Taliban forces surround plane

KANDAHAR (AFP) - Some 30 armed Taliban militiamen surrounded the hijacked Indian Airlines plane on the runway here Thursday.

Shortly afterwards, a tank took up a position on a hilltop overlooking the airport. A Toyota pickup truck carrying two Taliban fighters armed with Stinger missiles then circled the plane before finally coming to a halt at the end of the runway.

The show of strength followed a warning from the Taliban on Wednesday that they could force the plane to leave Afghanistan if there was no speedy end to the drama.

Taliban officials, however, described the moves as a routine changing of the guard around the airliner and a 'security' operation and said their patience with the standoff had not been exhausted. 'It's a normal situation,' Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel told AFP.

'We are informing (the hijackers) it is only for security. We have only changed the security people, they are tired and we have to change them. There is nothing else. We will be patient,' he said.

A convoy of 10 pick-up trucks carrying armed Taliban militiamen had earlier sped towards the Indian Airlines Airbus, which has been parked here since Saturday with some 160 hostages aboard. An armoured personnel carrier was seen by AFP arriving at the airport at around the same time, with anti-aircraft guns pointed at the jet.

After some 30 minutes the pick-up trucks left the airport leaving the aircraft ringed by 30 armed Taliban commandos standing on the runway.

Within 45 minutes of the new guards' arrival a tank took up a position on a hilltop on the far side of the airport from the control tower, around 700 metres from the aircraft.

The armoured personnel carrier remained in place and two militia transport trucks were parked near the APC some 300 metres from the plane.

Taliban officials have been refuelling the plane since early Thursday morning. Its engines have been running virtually non-stop since it landed here Saturday after stops in Amritsar, Lahore and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

The Taliban indicated Wednesday they were losing patience with the crisis, which began with the Christmas Eve hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane on a flight between Kathmandu and New Delhi.

Taliban may force plane to leave Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Dec 29: The Taliban warned on Wednesday they could force the hijacked Indian Airlines jet to leave the country unless India negotiated a quick solution to the crisis.

"If the Indian side doesn't peacefully solve the problem, our next step will be to ask the hijackers to immediately leave Afghanistan and if not we will force them to leave," Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel told reporters at Kandahar airport.

He said no deadline had been set."We are not here to give deadlines we are just here to find a peaceful solution to the problem," he said.

Before force was used, he said, talks would be held with Indian negotiators and foreign diplomats. Mutawakel said the Taliban told the hijackers their demands were "un-Islamic."

The hijackers had agreed to drop their demands for 200 million dollars and the return of the body of Sajjad Afghani, he said.

"We asked them to drop two demands, which were un-Islamic," he said. "We requested the hijackers on behalf of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to abandon all their un-Islamic demands," he said.

Mutawakel said two employees from the state airline Afghan Ariana Airlines allowed on board the aircraft to clean late Tuesday had found "clots of blood," although there were no signs of any bodies, he said.

"They were given garbage and also saw clots of blood," he said. "They told us there was no sign of any dead bodies.

"They also told us that the people on the plane were pale, tired and exhausted."—AFP

DAWN

30 DEC 1999

Handling of hijack crisis boosts Taliban's image

KANDAHAR (AFP) - Long regarded as a pariah regime by the west, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia are winning praise for their handling of the Indian Airlines hijacking ordeal, diplomats say.

Since seizing the Afghan capital Kabul in 1996, the fundamentalist militia have imposed their strict interpretation of Islamic law on the country, forcing women to be virtual prisoners in their homes.

By allowing indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden to stay in the country the Taliban, religious students trained in seminaries on the Pakistan border, have earnt the wrath of the United Nations, and the United States in particular.

Only three countries in the world, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, recognise the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate rulers. But that poor image may be changing.

The seven-day Indian Airlines hijacking ordeal has shown the Taliban in a different light.

'They have been very positive in everything they've done here,' said one western diplomat, waiting by the parked jet at Kandahar airport, in southern Afghanistan.

'They've handled this well so far. They provided food for the plane, even guards for us.'

The hijacked Airbus A300 landed in Kandahar early on Christmas Day.

It has been parked on the runway here ever since, as Indian negotiators together with Taliban officials try to bring an end to the crisis.

It was Taliban intervention in the talks over the past two days which made the hijackers drop two of their latest demands, a 200 million dollars ransom and the exhumation of the body of a Kashmiri militant.

'We asked them to drop two demands, which were un-Islamic,' said Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel.

Now the Taliban appear to be increasingly frustrated with the long drawn out standoff.

Mutawakel said they may use force to make the plane leave, although diplomats here warned that would not be easy.

A convoy of pick-ups and jeeps sped on the airport runway Thursday, in an apparent show of force. An armoured personnel carrier, with anti-aircraft guns, and a tank took up positions around the aircraft. No shots were fired.

'The only problem I see here is that the Taliban do not have the facilities to manage the situation,' said the western diplomat, who declined to be named.

'It is good that the foreign minister is coming every day but it seems he's very much alone.'

Others welcomed Mutawakel's repeated concerns about the health and safety of the passengers.

He warned earlier in the week the Taliban would not tolerate injuries to or the killing of passengers in Afghanistan. 'The Taliban authorities have time and again said what is important for them is the safety and security of people on board and I believe this is very, very genuine,' said Erick de Mul, the UN coordinator for Afghanistan, who was involved in the early stage of negotiations.

But he admitted they were under heavy pressure. As well as more than 100 Indian passengers on board, there are also nationals from many other countries including France, Australia, Japan, Canada, Belgium, Italy, Nepal, Spain, Switzerland.

Each country has at least one diplomat here, living out of the airport's VIP lounge, waiting for the hostages' release.

NATION 31 DEC 1999

Hijackers reject bid to release children

KANDAHAR, Dec 28: Hijackers holding 155 people hostage on an Indian plane in Afghanistan rejected an appeal to free children and their mothers on day five of their ordeal on Tuesday, India's foreign minister said.

"We have appealed to the hijackers at least let the children along with their mothers come out of the aircraft. They have not acceded to our demand," Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told a news conference in New Delhi after almost 24 hours of negotiations at the airport in Kandahar.

He also said the Indian negotiating team was waiting for a response to a request for the hijackers to spell out their "expectations", and added that the Taliban had continued to warn the hijackers that the plane would be stormed it the hostages were harmed.

"We have asked the hijackers to spell out what their expectations are and we are awaiting their response," Singh said.

"The Taliban have continued to warn the hijackers any injury to any of the hostages will result in an immediate overtaking of the aircraft by Taliban forces. I am grateful to report the Taliban are fully cooperating with the relief and negotiating teams."

He added that the hijackers had said they would not set another deadline following the expiry of a deadline on Monday after which they had threatened to start killing the hostages.

It passed without apparent incident.—Reuters

DAWN 29 DEC 1999

Envoys keep vigil at Kandahar airport

By Our Staff Correspondent

KANDAHAR, Dec 30: A crowd of diplomats are crammed into a small VIP lodge at the airport here, waiting and hoping for the release of 160 hostages held on an Indian Airlines jet.

There is little they can do. Indian negotiators, with senior Taliban officials, are in touch with the hijackers by radio throughout the day. But progress has been slow.

Most of the passengers on board the Airbus A300, hijacked on Christmas Eve, are Indian but among them are thought to be eight Nepalese, four Spaniards, four Swiss, two French nationals, an Italian, a Canadian, a Belgian, an Australian and a Japanese.

Each of the countries has at least one diplomat at the airport, reporting back to their embassies daily in Islamabad.

By day they monitor the frustratingly slow negotiations with the five or six armed hijackers and are given briefings by Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel.

"We are not involved in the process of negotiations or anything like that. We are just here to monitor their welfare. This is an Indian plane and we have left it to the Indians," said one Western diplomat.

He said the diplomats had not been able to talk to their citizens on board the jet.

"Little is known about our people's condition inside the plane, but we are sure they are sharing the same ordeal with the other folks," the diplomat said.

Although medicines have been taken on board and UN and Red Cross medical teams are standing by, the hijackers have so far refused to allow doctors to check the health of the passengers.

Afghanistan also presents its own problems.

"The hijackers were very clever to come here," said one diplomat. "It is almost like a jungle."

Communication between Afghanistan and the outside world are poor, mostly reliant on satellite phones.

"There is no sense of time here," the diplomat said. "And the Indians don't seem to have any tactics. They have to keep reporting back to Delhi and waiting for their response."

But the Taliban have tried hard to offer food and facilities for the hostages and those waiting for their release.

Nevertheless, they threaten to use force unless a solution is achieved.

"The Taliban want the plane to go, they are frustrated. It is a hot potato for them," the diplomat said.

"It is a difficult situation, but the authorities are doing their best for everyone according to their famous Afghan hospitality," another said.

"There is very little they can really do in this particular situation."

It is not clear if the aircraft, whose engine has been running almost non-stop since it landed here, can take off again without a full service.

The engine is on to ventilate during the daytime and provide heat on board at night time when temperature falls to eight below freezing point.—AFP

DAWN 31 DEC 1999

NATION 25 DEC 1999

6 killed in Taliban attack

KABUL (AFP) - Afghan opposition groups said Friday Taliban jets attacked Sholgara, in the northern province of Balkh, killing six civilians and wounding eight others.

A statement received from the Harak-i-Islami party said the ruling militia's jets carried out four attacks on Thursday afternoon.

Sholgara district, which is between the Taliban areas in Balkh and the opposition mountain positions in nearby Samangan province, has been the scene of intense fighting, it said.

According to the statement, opposition soldiers Wednesday captured key positions in this area from the Taliban. The fighting has since subsided, it said.

The opposition rival alliance, led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood, is based in a slice of land in the northeast and is holding out against the religious militia, who control most of Afghanistan including the capital Kabul.

'Taliban violating Ramazan truce'

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Despite pledges to honour a Ramadan cease-fire, Taliban militia has continued to launch a number of offensives in Balkh and Sarre Pul provinces in an attempt to remove opposition "United Front" troops from their bases in the North, an opposition commander said Monday.

United Front troops, however, have not only managed to defend their strongholds but have also succeeded in dislodging Taliban from key districts in these provinces, commander Hussain Anwari said in a statement from northern Takhar province. In Balkh, United Front troops, after defending their strongholds, managed to recapture the district of Chapchal, he said.

NATION

21 DEC 1999

Taliban flayed for allowing poppy cultivation

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Shah Agha Siddique Mujaddadi, a known socio-politico figure from Afghanistan has denounced the Taliban leadership for allowing cultivation of poppy crop publicly and said that it would not only make further isolated the war affected Afghans but even it could endanger future of the young generation in all over the world.

Talking to *The Nation* on Tuesday, Shah Agha Siddique Mujaddadi reminded that due to uncertain situation and lack of centralised authority, Afghanistan's national and Islamic image was badly affected.

Elaborating his point of view, he said that due to in-fighting, Afghanistan has not only become a safe for hard liners but even it has become a safe din for opium production.

In response to a question, Shah Agha Mujaddadi said that majority of the Afghans are aware about the bad impacts of narcotics against humanity. He said that they are against poppy crop cultivation, opium production and heroin manufacturing. However, the Taliban and other leaders of the several warring functions just for their nefarious designs are encouraging the poppy crop cultivation in that country. He was of the view that through such permission of Taliban to the farmers, not only Afghanistan could be further isolated but it could enhance problems for the already war-affected Afghans.

Shah Agha Siddique Mujaddadi said that he considered heroin manufacturing and opium production not only against the interests of international community but even against Afghans. He said that they welcome the global struggle against narcotics.

Answering another question, Shah Agha Siddique Mujaddadi said that it is crystal clear that warring faction's policies are neither in interests of Afghanistan nor its people.

Shah Agha said that if Taliban follow a realistic approach towards the existing problems then no one could impose embargos against it. He said that Afghanistan is a member of the international community and without honouring decisions and resolutions of the United Nations, no one could ensure solution to problems.

NATION

01 DEC 1999

Afghans' mixed reaction to Rome conference

ISLAMABAD (PPI) – The spokesman of the Northern Alliance and representative of an independent wing of Hezb-e- Whadat have lauded the Rome meeting while the Germany-based Association of the Afghans has condemned it, VOA reported.

According the spokesman for the northern alliance, Dr. Abdullah the rome meeting took first step for the restoration of a just peace in Afghanistan.

He said that every effort leading to the establishment of an elected government in Afghanistan is a welcoming and good development. He lauded the decisions and resolutions of the rome meeting which called for convening of loya jirga in Afghanistan next year in which nearly five hundred representatives are expected participate.

Meanwhile the head of the independent wing of Hezb-e-Wahdat, Syed Mustafa Kazmi has also praised the rome meeting saying his party has welcome all the peace efforts in different time. The latest rome meeting can take positive step in th is direction, he added.

He said that Afghanistan is burning in the flames of civil war and has been turned into pieces, now there is need for stability, brotherhood, national unity and formation of a broad baseds government acceptable to all the people of Afghanistan. The only way to achieve this goal, he said is negotiations and consensus.

However, the Association of the afghan refugees in a meeting in Germany has condemned the rome meeting. Qasim Nawabi, one of the organizers of the meeting, said that they have convened the meeting to analyse the rome meeting.

He said that the meeting attended by a large number of afghans near Frankfurt decided that such meetings abroad cannot heel the wounds of the people of Afghanistan. Besides, a number of nationalists, the parchamis attended the rome meeting who were even in majority.

NATION

01 DEC 1999

Loya Jirga only solution to Afghanistan problem

NATION 01 DEC 1999

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Though Taliban are reluctant to vacate the official posts and let the mediators think about a political solution, the Rome Conference has concentrated its declaration on such a proposal which can ensure an end to the long awaited conflict.

While highlighting objectives of the emergency Loya Jirga, the text of the declaration states, to end the Afghan conflict, to appoint a head of state and to establish a transitional government in accordance with the situation in the country and the wishes of the Afghan people. This interim government will bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan.

It recalled that for two decades Afghanistan has been in a state of violent upheaval. This tragedy began with the Soviet invasion in 1979 and continued after the withdrawal of the invading forces. As a result of this foreign occupation, and the ensuing proxy wars and internal conflict, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed, massive human rights violations and immense physical destruction has taken place, and millions of people have been displaced. The conflict in Afghanistan has also continued to pose a threat to regional and international peace and stability.

Responding to this dire situation, the former King of Afghanistan, Mohammad Zahir Shah launched the first of a series of steps in order to convene the emergency loya jirga, the traditional Afghan Grand Assembly. To move forward in implementing former king's proposals, a group of Afghans representing diverse factions, sectors and ethnic groups were chosen as members of the Organising Committee of the Emergency Loya Jirga.

The Organising Committee in its opening session has called for an immediate cease-fire as well as to every sort of foreign interferences in affairs of Afghanistan. In this connection, the group urged the United Nations to play its active role for restoration of peace and tranquility in Afghanistan which is possible with declaration of a cease-fire and an end to every sort of foreign interference in affairs of Afghanistan.

In connection with convening a meeting of the Emergency Loya Jirga, they agreed for taking the following steps,a) To ensure international support for the convening of the Loya Jirga, delegations should be sent to the United Nations, neighbouring countries, the United States, member states of the European Union, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and other International bodies and governments to explain the outcome of the meeting, and to seek their cooperation with and participation in the process.

B) To seek the cooperation of the main warring parties (i.e.) the Taliban and the United Front) for the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga in Afghanistan, delegations should be sent to discuss the organisation modalities and to invite their participation and cooperation. C) To mobalise support among those Afghans, both inside and outside Afghanistan, not directly involved in the war, the opening of offices should be considered in Pakistan and Iran in cooperation with the respective governments.

Taliban committed to peace in Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - Hidayat Ullah Bangash, Secretary General of the Pukhtoon Social Democratic Party has praised Taliban for restoration of a peaceful atmosphere in Afghanistan but he expressed reservation over their strict policies regarding implementation of the Islamic system.

Afghanistan had been divided into scores of sub-states and regions whereas the war-affected people were unaware of other laws except guns and bullets. But Taliban after their emergence from Qandahar in 1995 had not only established a peaceful atmosphere in more than 90 per cent of the area but even they and disarmed the jehadic commanders.

He dispelled the impression that Taliban are products of a secret agency from Pakistan, saying that this movement is not new. Elaborating his point of view, he said that Taliban's movement could be considered a continuation of the movements aimed at spreading education among the Pukhtoons. In this connection, he diverted attention towards Tehrik-e-Afaghna of late Bacha Khan. However, he added that he didn't support several steps of Taliban and he suggested their leaders to revise their strict decisions and policies.

In response to a question, Bangash said that they are desirous for return of peace and tranquility in all over Afghanistan. Advocating in favour of his point of view, he said that restoration of peace is not only essential for Afghanistan and its people but even it may be fruitful to Pakistan, Iran, Russian Federation, Central Asian Republics and others.

The PSDP leader while highlighting objectives of the party said that it was struggling for safeguarding interests of the Pukhtoons which is possible only through their unification. In this connection, he said that they didn't recognise the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

NATION 01 DEC 1999

Afghan elders praise peace initiative of King Zahir Shah

From Our Correspondnet

PESHAWAR – The elders and intellectuals from various provinces of Afghanistan held a gathering at Miran Shah, headquarter of North Waziristan Agency, where they announced their whole-hearted support in favour of the peace initiatives of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah and urged the global community to take early steps for its implementation.

The elders, commanders, religious scholars and others belong to Logar, Paktya, Ghazni, Maidan, Baghlan, Kandoz and other provinces settled in North Waziristan Agency arranged a traditional Jirga. The Jirga was chaired by Shehzada Masud and besides him was addressed by Maulvi Naeem, Commander Islamyar, Dr. Baz Mohammad, Brag. Aman Ullah, Abdul Samad Khan and Alam Gul.

Shehzada Masud who had represented people from Logar Province in the recently concluded Rome, Italy, briefed the *Jirga* about its minutes and declaration. He said that former king Mohammad Zahir Shah has no intention to remain in power or impose his choiced people on Afghans. He is desirous only for return of peace in torn Afghanistan and is struggling for mutual understanding and consultation among its people.

For such purpose, he decided to initiate efforts to convene a meeting of a *Loya Jirga* wherein genuine representatives of the people should build up a consensus among them about the future setup of that country.

On this occasion, Shehzada Masud answered to a number of questions and declared that those who have been assembled at Rome, Italy, on the invitation of former King were members of the organising committee. Such people, according to him, have discussed ways and means for constitution and convening a meeting of the traditional *Loya Jirga*. He added that now people from each and every corner of Afghanistan would send their acceptable representatives to the proposed *Loya Jirga*. He was of the firm belief that through such steps, on one hand the Afghans would get their just right of self-determination and on the other they would get a peaceful atmosphere in their motherland. He urged the Afghans from all over the world to come forward and support efforts of former king Mohammad Zahir Shah.

Following a detailed briefing by Shehzada Masud, the *Jirga* through a unanimous resolution announced its whole-hearted support in favour of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah's peace initiatives and desired to work day and night for its implementation. In this respect, the Jirga has called upon the warring Afghan factions to stop fighting and early announce their support in favour of the proposed *Loya Jirga*. It also urged the peace-loving, patriotic and democratic minded Afghans from all over the world to assemble on one forum for early implementation of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah's peace efforts which ensure an end to 20-year imposed in-fighting and reconstruction of the war damaged country.

Through another resolution, the *Jirga* has denounced the continued foreign interferences in the affairs of Afghanistan and asked the UN and OICto fulfil its responsibilities.

It also urged all of the foreign countries, particularly the neighbouring and regional States to stop meddling in the affairs of Afghanistan and let its people to decide its future according to their own traditions.

NATION 09 DEC 1999

'Zahir Plan can help resolve Afghan issue'

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Maulvi Abdul Qayoom Neknam, known religious figure from Paktya province of Afghanistan while expressing concern over the negative policies of certain Afghan leaders, has alleged that these elements had always fuelled the war flames to get their nefarious designs fulfilled.

"In fact there is no differences between the former communists and Jehadic leaders. Elaborating his point of view, Maulvi Abdul Qayoom recalled that at the behest of former Soviet Union, the previous communists have not only invited the Red Army to their motherland. He added that as a result of such brutalities more then 1.5 million Afghans have lost their lives and millions of others migrated to other foreign countries.

Similarly, after withdrawal of former Soviet troops and fall of regime in Kabul, the *Jehadic* leaders have not only ignored objectives of *Jehad* but even they and their colleagues and supporters have followed the policies of former communists. As a result of such steps, Afghanistan was divided into countless parts and regions and the so-called Mujahideen have initiated worst kind of brutalities against the civilians.

Like former Soviets and their communist friends, the Mujahideen have also inflicted severe human and property losses to Afghans and now millions of Afghans, even those who have rendered tremendous sacrifices in Jehad, are passing through severe socio-economic crises.

Maulvi Abdul Qayoom Neknam further said that it is crystal clear that taking a notice of increasing grievances of the war-affected Afghans, former king Mohammad Zahir Shah has initiated a struggle for resolving the conflict. In this connection, he invited some leading Afghan figures for consultations. However, those who didn't receive invitations now making a baseless propaganda against the former king. In this connection, he named Prof. Mujaddedi and Gen. Rehmat Ullah Safi like people. He alleged that both of them have always served their personal interests.

He said that in fact, time has proved that former king Mohammad Zahir Shah is the lone leader acceptable to majority of the Afghans in the wake of his neutral and impartial role in the last 20 years. He added that almost all of jehadic and communist leaders are confined to a particular part and area of Afghanistan while Mohammad Zahir Shah is enjoying support in each and every corner of Afghanistan.

NATION 10 DEC 1999

Crackdown against Afghans resented

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – The Afghan elders and public opinion makers, settled in various parts of NWFP and tribal areas have expressed grave concern over crackdown against the Afghan nationals and demanded of the government to stop such action without any further delay.

Maulvi Abdul Qayoom Neknam, a religious figure from Paktya province while expressing concern over arrests of the Afghan nationals, said that it could be considered a part of a well-planned conspiracy aimed at increasing differences between people of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Elaborating his point of view, he said that it is crystal clear that Pakistan and its people have extended unprecdental support to Afghan Mujahideen and hospitality to millions of Afghan refugees. Each and every Afghan always praises Pakistan for this contribution.

Former Afghan diplomat and an active leader of the Afghan National Liberation Front, Humayoon Shinwari while expressing concern over increasing panic among the Afghan refugees attributed it to the failure of Taliban leaders. Elaborating his point of view, he said that according to diplomatic norms, the representatives of Taliban need to take up the matter with the host authorities.

He added that due to failure of Taliban leaders, now the Afghans who are unable to stay away in their homeland.

Humayoon Shinwari further said that Afghans are considering Pakistan as their second homeland and they pray for peace and stability in this country. He called upon the Pakistani authorities to announce a comprehensive policy regarding Afghan refugees. He added that due to unrealistic policies of Taliban, it is impossible for the Afghan refugees to go back to their motherland.

Shehzada Mehsud, an Afghan elder from Logar province of Afghanistan while resenting arrest of the innocent Afghan nationals, said that through such steps no one could ensure solution to the issue. He said that it is crystal clear that unless return of complete peace and tranquility in Afghanistan, it is impossible for the Afghan nationals to go back.

And similar may be the problem for Pakistan. In this connection, he suggested the Pakistani authorities to take practical steps for finding out a permanent solution to the issue which is possible only through establishment of a centralised government in Afghanistan.

Former Afghan Minister Abdul Qadar Imami also urged the Pakistani authorities to revise such policies. He said that instead of harassing and pressurising the war-affected Afghan nationals, Pakistani leadership need to back the UN efforts aimed at building up a consensus among the Afghans for formation of a representative government.

NATION 21 DEC 1999

NATION 25 DEC 1999

Afghans call for early end to infighting

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – In connection with its efforts for mustering support of the Afghans in favour of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah's peace formula, Syed Hamid Gillani, Deputy leader of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) presided over a meeting.

A NIFA spokesman on Friday informed that the meeting beside the NIFA stalwarts and members was also attended by a large number of leading Afghan intellectuals, ulema, commanders, tribal chieftains, former technocrats and others. Syed Hamid Gillani has briefed the participants about salient features of the former king Mohammad Zahir Shah peace proposals aimed at finding out an early solution to the long-awaited Afghan conflict.

Addressing the meeting, Syed Hamid Gillani said that 20-year long fighting and confrontation in Afghanistan inflicted severe human and property losses to Afghans. Now each and every home of Afghan was affected by such an imposed war and all of them need to think about an end to this conflict. He added that it is crystal clear that no one could get his objectives through military ways, therefore, all them need to adopt the realistic approach towards resolving of the conflict. He said that it is needs of the hour that both Taliban and their rivals need to stop fighting.

Advocating in favour of the peace initiatives of former king, the NIFA Deputy leader remarked that neither the ex-king intended to return to power nor he had any favourate for such office. Former king is just demanding right of self determination to the Afghans.

He urged the participants to come forward and support the former king initiatives for resolving of the dispute.

Syed Hamid Gillani added that now each and every Afghan had been made disheartened by the 20 year long fighting and they couldn't afford further bloodshed and destruction in their motherland. He said that United Nations, OIC, United States, Saudi, Arab, Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries and forces need to support the peace loving and patriotic Afghans for holding an early meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga. He was of the firm belief that through a meeting of the Loya Jirga, the Afghan elders, could easily build up a consensus among them.

Revenue be freed from bureaucratic setup

The revenue generation departments like CBR, Customs Collectorate and Income Tax have failed to devise a viable taxation system, therefore, time has come to get rid these departments of the clutches of bureaucratic setup.

This was stated by ex-State Minister for Industries and a leading industrialist of NWFP Muhammad Unis Elahi in a statement here on Friday. He held the revenue generation departments responsible for the downfall of the national economy and urged the new government to take solid steps.

Afghan elders delegation to meet Taliban for prisoners release

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — In a bid to seek release of more than 170 prisoners, some of the stalwarts of Eastern Zonal Shoora have established contacts with the Taliban leaders which could be considered first-ever contact between the two sides.

The reports from inside Afghanistan reveal that a delegation of elders from various parts of the border Nangarhar province have held a detail meeting with the Talibaan leaders at Jalalabad. The elders, most of whom remained as members of the former ruling Eastern Shoora have apprised in depth the Taliban leaders about the fate of more than 170 prisoners and appealed for their early release.

The Taliban leaders while capturing the border Nangarhar province of Afghanistan in September 1996 had arrested a large number of youngsters on the charges of supporting the previous government of Governor Haji Abdul Qadeer Khan. So far, number of these youngsters had been estimated above 170 and all of them were later on shifted to Qandahar. Now all these prisoners are living behind the bars in Qandahar.

Humayoon Shinwari, a former member of the Eastern Shoora has welcomed such a contact between the two sides and stated it a positive development. He added that near and dear of these prisoners, mostly are young boys are passing through severe crisis, therefore, they should be released without any further delay. He also urged Taliban leaders to announce release of all those prisoners who were arrested on political grounds.

NATION 14 DEC 1999

Deforestation-a threat to environmental security

Environment Scene

From Miangul Naeem

PESHAWAR - The ruthless deforestation in Kuner-Nuristan province of neighboring Afghanistan is likely to cause a grave environmental security problem in the region. The tropical cover of fine Deodar trees in Kuner, bordering Chitral—Dir districts and Bajore agency of Pakistan, is being cut down at unprecedented scale and smuggled to Pakistani markets through various routs on the porous Pak-Afghan border.

According to one estimate the forest cover of only Deodar trees in Kuner-Nuristan spread over about 1,65,000 acres area before the outbreak of war in Afghanistan in 1979. " More than 80 per cent of it has been exhausted during last the last one decade ", a highly placed official of forest department of NWFP government told The Nation on request of anonymity.

The deforestation in Afghanistan touched its peak after the Care taker government of Moeen Qurishe imposed ban on forest harvesting in Pakistan in the aftermath of Devastating flood of September 1992 in Hazara division. The contracting community of NWFP crossed into Afghanistan and mercilessly destroyed the otherwise dense Deodar forest.

A reliable official source said that about 25 million cubic feet Afghan timber has crossed to Pakistan via Quetta-Chaman . While nearly 8 million cubic feet of timber has been transported to NWFP in the form of permits issued by Successive Governors' and successive Chief Ministers of 'NWFP through Shahi, beni- Shahi of Samarbagh division, Upper Dir.

" About three lakh cubic feet of Afghan timber is still dumped at Shahi top and Samarbagh area ", a source said. Not to mention the thousands of feet Afghan timber which has flooded the private depots at Shero Jangi on Charsada Road and Hayatabad through illegal Channels. "Ironically nobody ask these timber marchants how they transport timber to Peshawar markets ", an official said.

Sources said that this timber in bulk has been smuggled into the provincial capital from across the border through Bajore, Mohmand and khyber agencies by the contracting community without paying the custom duty, sale tax, octroi, or forest duty leviable at the rate of Rs.40 per cubic foot.

The harsh reality is that the Pakistan authorities maintained enforcement of ban on forest harvesting in their own country but kept up issuing permits to the timber mafia for transportation of Afghan timber to cater to the briskly mode of Pakistani people . And under this legal cover provided by the successive governors, Chief Ministers and forest officials, the timber mafia played havoc with rich forest wealth of Afghanistan, forgetting the far-reaching impacts of deforestation which could spell over to this side of the border in future.

Environment, they say, transcend all boundaries. It has been included in the definition of national, regional and global security. The destablisation of environment in one region directly affect the environment of other region. The developed world pumps thousands of dollars to developing countries for the protection of their environment because its destablisation adversely affect the environment in the developed world.

Presently the forest stocks in Afghanistan are believed to be reaching an exhaustion. As nothing is going in right direction in that war-devastating country. But still large-scale reconstruction awaits peace there.

This would require large volumes of timber which would certainly trigger reverse flow from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

The forest resource of Pakistan is already increasingly being threatened by the influential timber mafia coupled with rapid growth of population.

The re-transportation of forest timber from Pakistan for the proposed reconstruction activity in Afghanistan by hook or by crook will bring the meager forest of Pakistan under tremendous stress which will have profound implications for international and regional security. Besides, triggering cross-border conflicts, the deforestation would disturb the fragile ecosystem. It could reduce average rainfall, contribute to global warming, cause soil erosion and siltation.The siltation would further cause floods and droughts and so the list goes on.

Already the influx of Afghan refugees have flooded the labour markets of NWFP, over-burdened its infrastructure, intensified the environmental stress and above all create food security problem. The merciless harvesting of their forest wealth could cause a security problem with much higher tragic results not only for them but for the whole region. At the moment Tomorrow seems as worse if today is to be taken the yardstick.

NATION 03 DEC 1999

Taliban can afford to be defiant

ZUBER has a gaze that's a little too steady. Taken together with his bushy black beard, shaved head and tan *shalwar kamiz*- the pajama-like clothes that Afghan men wear - the effect is unsettling. He looks like one of those Afghans who have seen too much war. But Zuber's ghosts have a different origin. Until a month ago, the 30-year-old Afghan worked at an opium-processing factory in Nangarhar province that produced up to 100 kilograms of morphine base - used to make heroin - every day. He says the place was thick with steam from boiling vats of opium gum. "Whether you like it or not, you're breathing it." says Zuber, who recently checked into a rehabilitation clinic in Peshawar, Pakistan. "When you get home, after the opium wears off, your legs and arms begin to ache, and so you start eating or smoking opium to relieve the pain." The clinic Zuber now calls home has 20 beds and a waiting list with 3,000 names. Some addicts have scars on their heads where they once sliced open their scalps to rub heroin into the wounds. They thought that was the quickest route to their brains.

Afghanistan, wrecked by 20 years of war and ruled by Islamic radical and rival militians, now has one perverse claim to success. With this year's bumper poppy crop, it became the world's undisputed leader in the production of opium. The United Nations estimates that Afghanistan accounted for an astonishing three quarters of the global output in 1999, eclipsing the Golden Triangle region of Burma, Laos and Thailand, (United States estimates differ widely from the United Nations, but also show Afghanistan leading all other producers this year.) Afghan heroin is feeding an already swollen population of junkies in neighbouring Pakistan, which has nearly 2 million addicts, and also in Iran, Central Asia and Russia. As much as 90 per cent of the heroin used in Europe originates in Afghanistan and United States officials worry that increased quantities will soon find their way there. The radical Islamic Taliban militia that rules most of Afghanistan, meanwhile is partly funding itself by taxing the opium trade.

This presents policy makers across the globe with a dilemma. How do you combat drug production in a country that, even if you ignore the heroin trade, already is treated like a pariah? The Taliban, which administers roughly 85 per cent of Afghanistan, says it wants to cooperate with drug eradication efforts, but it lacks credibility. Only three countries in the world recognise its government: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It practices what the West calls "gender apartheid" by severely subjugating women. It has committed atrocities against minorities, including round-ups of ethnic Hazaras, some of whom have disappeared. And it harbors Islamic extremists like Osama bin Laden, the alleged ringleader behind the bombings of two US embassies in Africa last year that killed 224 people.

Intense diplomatic pressure on the Taliban has failed to extract concessions. In July, Washington banned all US commerce with Afghanistan because of the Taliban's refusal to turn over bin Laden. When that failed, the UN Security Council three weeks ago ordered a freeze on overseas accounts of Taliban leaders and imposed a ban on its airline. The Taliban was unyielding. "We will never hand over Osama bin Laden," scoffed Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil, the Taliban's Foreign Minister. "He will remain free in defiance of America."

The Taliban can afford to be defiant, in part because the opium business provides it with both income and political leverage. To bring the trade to an end, Taliban mullahs argue, the United Nations should recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government and work with it on alternatives. In the meantime, it's clear that by allowing opium production, the Taliban improved economic conditions in areas under its control, and attracts needed tax revenue to prosecute the war against its rivals.

For the record, Taliban officials say they oppose drugs, and rightly argue that poppy cultivation was part of th e Afghan landscape long before the Taliban force its rivals out of Kabul in 1996. The regime has its own drug czar, and it occasionally makes a show of destroying poppy fields or closing labs. Most recently it ordered farmers to reduce their planting of poppies this season by 30 per cent. It also admits to imposing a 10 per cent *usher* – or religious tax – on the poppy crop. But officials argue that poppies are not a drug, and say the tax is no different from that charged on, say wheat. Moreover, they insist they cannot afford – politically to crack down on farmers. "We are against poppy cultivation, narcotics production and drugs," says Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, the Taliban representative in the United States. "But we cannot fight our own people. They are the sole source of our authority."

That's only a half truth. The fuller version is that the Taliban also earns taxes not only from poppies, but also directly from the heroin labs. Zuber, the addict who now lives in Peshawar's European-run ORA clinic, says that his lap packed morphine base into six-kilogram bundles that were taxed about $ 55 per kilo by the Taliban. The daily tax revenue at the lab alone could amount to $ 5,500 in peak season – and the facility was one of 20 or 25 in the vicinity.

"Criminals elements, religious elements and official elements are all connected in the heroin trade like rice and honey", says a law-enforcement agent for a Western government who has done undercover work in Afghanistan. Smugglers provide farmers credit in advance of their harvest-much needed in a country that has been largely destroyed – and mullahs sometimes say a blessing over an opium shipment before it travels. "You have a whole country re-orienting itself around this crop," says David Mansfied, a UN drug-control researcher who conducts surveys in Afghanistan.

Unlike its Afghan rivals, the Taliban have provided a reasonable semblance of security in the areas it controls. It guarantees protection for traders, whatever their business. The Western law-enforcement agent, who requested anonymity, recalls an incident in 1996, when an opium-producing ring had a large shipment of a precursor chemical used in heroin refinement stolen en route through southern Helmand province. The group contacted Taliban authorities, who tracked the purloined property and promptly returned it.

This source also says that he saw bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1995. At that time, he says, bin Laden's mujahideen were helping to ship drugs across Iran to Turkey. ("There have been many reports that bin Laden is involved in narcotics trafficking, but they're difficult to verify," says a US official. "We can't even find out exactly where the guy is.")

One of the largest drug barons in Kandahar, the Taliban capital, is a friend of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar. According to Afghan and Western sources, Haji Bashar Mohammed fought side by side with Mullah Omar during the US-backed *jihad* against Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Long after the Russians were chased out, when Mullah Omar began leading the Taliban militia, Bashar gave him his

See Next ...

NATION 14 DEC 1999

Resolving the Afghan imbroglio

THE Chief Executive of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf said after his recent talks in Tehran about Afghanistan: We reaffirm our support for the establishment of a broad-based, representative and multi-ethnic government in accordance with the wishes of the Afghan people.

According to political analysts the new administration in Islamabad has a more cohesive policy towards Afghanistan and wants to find a peaceul solution.

In the circumstances which prevail in Afghanistan, the Afghan people cannot express their wishes through general elections. In the country's history, for centuries a shortcut to general elections has been used. It is the Loya Jirga. Traditionally the Afghan people refer their major problems to the Loya Jirga. All Afghanistan's constitutions have been adopted by this traditional assembly. Loya Jirga is Afghanistan's traditional constitutional assembly.

Loya Jirgas have always been convened by a supreme authority. Obviously the authority which calls the Loya Jirga plays the most important role in its decisions. In the present circumstances, if the Loya Jirga is convened by the Taliban it will not resolve Afghanistan's problems, therefore the Loya Jirga should be convened by a supreme authority representing Afghanistan's silent majority.

After the Rome gathering from Nov. 22 to 25, the main questions are what will be the attitude of Pakistan towards this Loya Jirga and what will be its composition to be acceptable to Pakistan and Iran? If the Taliban and United Front leaders and the army commanders of both sides do not attend the Loya Jirga and do not take part in the decisions and if the Loya Jirga is not supported by Pakistan and Iran, can peace be restored in Afghanistan? The Loya Jirga can be effective only if all real political forces, inside and outside Afghanistan, are represented and it is supported by Pakistan and Iran.

What would be the composition of the Loya Jirga for it to be acceptable to Afghanistan's neighbours and for its decisions to be effectively implemented? Irrespective of the parties represented, it is necessary that the assembly should be represented by all Afghan military, religious, social and intellectual forces and acceptable to all Afghanistan's neighbours. Therefore, it should be composed of as numerous members as possible (3000 members).

The emergency Loya Jirga may be composed of two groups of members: non-elected and elected.

Non-elected members should be selected by a committee supervised by former King Zahir Shah. They will include:

300 among senior military officers and commanders of Taliban from a list presented by Taliban leaders.

300 among the most powerful United Front's commanders from a list presented by the United Front leaders.

300 among the leaders and senior members of the former political parties and Tanzims.

300 among political social and religious personalities living in Afghanistan who have no connection with either Taliban or the United Front.

300 among political personalities and knowledgeable figures living in the USA Europe, Pakistan, Iran and other countries.

The elected members of the Loya Jirga should be elected in such a way that one million people be represented by 100 members in the following way:

800 representatives among the people of Afghanistan living in the territory under the control of Taliban.

200 representatives among the people of Afghanistan living in the territory under the control of United Front.

250 representatives among the Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

250 representatives among the Afghan refugees living in Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikstan and Turkmenistan.

The list of candidates should be presented by the committee supervised by the former King Zahir Shah. The total number of elected members of the Loya Jirga will also be 1,500.

The election of these 1,500 representatives should be as it has always been the case in Afghanistan — through small public gatherings (Jirga). 800 Jirgas should be held in Afghanistan on the territory controlled by the Taliban, 200 Jirgas on the territory controlled by the United Front 250 jirgas on the territory of Pakistan and 250 jirgas on the territory of Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajekistan and Turkmenistan.

If Taliban, United Front and Afghanistan's neighbours agree to the holding of the emergency Loya Jirga and the formation of broad-based government the following items should be included in the agenda of the Loya Jirga:

Adoption of the rules of procedure of the Loya Jirga Proclamation of a cease-fire.

Endorsement of one of the previous constitutions of Afghanistan or a new constitution for the transitional period.

Election of a new head of state according to the constitution.

Membership of a provisional National Assembly from members of Loya Jirga 200 members of the Wolesi Jirga (House of Representatives) and 150 of the Meshrano Jirga. (Senate)

Membership of committee entrusted with the task of drafting a new constitution.

Membership of a committee entrusted with the task of drafting the law on political parties, the law of local administrations, the electoral law as well as the law on freedom of speech and press.

Decisions regarding the neutrality and demilitarisation of Afghanistan.

Decisions regarding the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

DR. MUHAMMAD SALIM MODJAZ
California, USA

DAWN 15 DEC 1999

Time to convene Loya Jirga

Rome Declaration may help form a broad-based govt in Afghanistan: Karzai

From Shamim Shahid

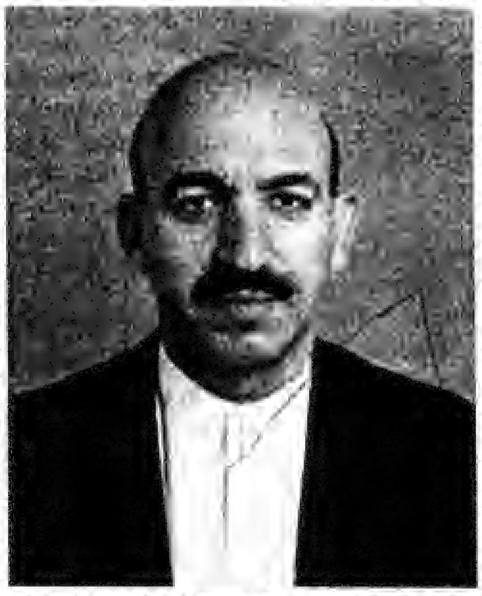
PESHAWAR – Return of complete peace and stability in Afghanistan is not only in the interest of war-affected people of the country but even it is beneficial to the neighbouring and regional countries. This objective can only be achieved by giving just right of self determination to Afghans.Ttherefore, the neighbouring countries need to help convene a meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga to ensure a consensus among the Afghans about transfer of power to a broad-based representative government.

These views were expressed by former Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid Karzai in an interview with *The Nation*. Hamid Karzai, who belongs to Qandahar, is now a days playing an active role in implementation of the recently concluded Rome, conference declaration. He is in contact with the Afghan elites, commanders, intellectuals, tribal chieftains and others. During Jehad days, Hamid Karzai had served the Press and Publicity sections of Prof. Mujaddadi's Afghan National Liberation Front. Soon after establishment of Mujahideen government in Kabul, he was inducted as a Deputy Foreign Minister.

However, when the Jehadic factions, after the fall of Dr Najib Ullah regime, entered in fightings, Hamid Karzai like of other moderate and technocrats, stayed away from the game. Though, he remained silent and neutral but at each and every forum, he raised voice in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict and attended a number of intra-Afghan dialogues and conferences in all over the world. His father late Abdul Ahad Khan Karzai who remained an active Afghan parliamentarian, minister for tribal affairs and governor of several provinces, was also considered an active moderate politician. Name of Abdul Ahad Khan Karzai was included in the list of those Afghans who are being killed mysteriously in Afghanistan since 1979. After the death of his father, now Hamid Karzai is leading his tribe, Popalzai, which dominates Qandahar province of Afghanistan.

Advocating in favour of a negotiated solution to the long awaited Afghan conflict, Hamid Karzai diverted attention towards influx of the terrorists, hijackers and narcotics traffickers to that country. "We are against every sort of terrorism and other criminal activities but are helpless at this stage to help the world community in this connection," he remarked, adding that an acceptable government may be empowered in Afghanistan. He was of the firm belief that whenever a broad-based representative government is empowered in Afghanistan, the world would see a fruitful response from the Afghans.

In response to a question, Hamid Karzai said that they want an early end to every sort of foreign interference in Afghanistan and said that maximum responsibility rests, in this regard, with the neighbouring and regional countries. Elaborating his point of view, he said that instead of supporting the warring factions, the regional and neighbouring countries to recognise just right of self-determination of the War-affected Afghans and help them in formation of a broad-based representative government in Kabul.



Mr Hamid Karzai, Ex. Foreign Minister of Afghanistan

Commenting on the recent talks between Pakistan and Iran over Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai said, "we welcome these developments." He reminded that due to their different point of views on a set-up in Afghanistan, Islamabad and Tehran had engaged in a kind of tussle and now they are expecting a reconciliation between the two countries. However, he said that such a reconciliation must be focused on realities i.e recognising wishes of the Afghans who are against further bloodshed and destruction. He added that both the countries need to help the war-affected Afghans in convening an early meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga in Afghanistan. He was of the view that with the formation of a friendly government in Kabul, rulers from both Pakistan and Iran could get maximum advantages.

Answering a question, Hamid Karzai said that according to declaration of the Rome, Conference, after coming Eid, they are going to start practical steps for convening a meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga. In this connection, he added that delegations will be sent to the warring factions in a bid to convince them for declaring a cease-fire. He added that such delegations would comprise respectable figures from all segments and they could be in a better position to influence the warring factions. He further said that they have made mind to include the people who are much acceptable and credible for Taliban as well as for the components of the Northern Alliance.

Besides, holding contacts with the warring factions, Hamid Karzai said ."We have also chalked out a plan to mobalise the common Afghans in favour of the Rome Conference declaration." In this connection, delegations would approach not only the Afghan socio-political leaders but even those who are residing in tent villages, rural and urban areas of Pakistan, tribal areas and others. He added that even after getting the objectives of a cease-fire between the warring factions, delegations would visit each and every part of Afghanistan for taking the Afghans into confidence about the future planning.

In response to a question, Hamid Karzai informed that three, out of the jehadic factions had attended the Rome, Italy conference. He added that a large number of eminent and active stalwarts of several other *jehadic* factions also turned to the Rome Conference in their individual capacity. He was of the view that majority of the *jehadic* parties stalwarts, commanders and supporters are also desirous for return of complete peace and stability in Afghanistan and they are supporting the efforts. He added that now in the light of Rome declaration, delegations would also approach the *Jehadic* leaders and stalwarts to contribute in the efforts aimed at an early solution to the conflict.

"We are not in a hurry," was his reply when questioned that when they would finalise these arrangements. Though we have accelerated efforts in favour of their common objective which is retur of peace and stability in our war-af fected motherland, we are very car ful." He added that they were dete mined to put all affairs on right trac and initiate efforts on solid grounds.

He called upon Afghans from all ove the world to realise importance of early return of peace and stability their motherland and extend support the Organising Committee of the Rom Conference which is sincerely stru gling to pull Afghanistan and its peop out of bloodshed. He added that "A ghans have been fed up with the pro war going on their soil and the UN OIC, 6+2, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Ar bia need to help Afghans in resolvi their disputes according to their ri and historical traditions."

NATION

27 DEC 1999

01 DEC 1999

NATION

Taliban deny using child soldiers

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia have denied a UN report they were using children as young as 14 as soldiers, United Nations officials said Wednesday.

The Taliban had a 'very strong reaction' after the annual UN report on Afghanistan was released on Monday, said Erick de Mul, UN coordinator for Afghanistan.

The militia asked for proof of the allegations, which they dismissed during a meeting in Kabul Wednesday.

And the Taliban allowed the United Nations to travel to the frontlines, in the Shomali plains north of Kabul.

When he returned, de Mul told journalists what he had seen at the front 'didn't give the impression' the Taliban were using child soldiers.

In July the Taliban launched a major offensive against the opposition, led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood, to win the Shomali plains which stretch from Kabul to the Hindu Kush mountain range 100 kilometres (60 miles) further north.

In that offensive, the UN report said, the Taliban used reinforcements, including children as young as 14.

02 DEC 1999

Mulla Omar asks Afghans to rely on Allah

KABUL (PPI) – Mullah Mohammad Omar, the supereme commander of Taliban, has called upon the countrymen to rely on Allah and not to rely on United Nations or United States for help.

In a message Mullah Omar asked the countrymen to accept the situation and do not rely on the United Nations or the Uniteds States for help, instead they should rely on Allah.

Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan is worsening followed by sanctions clamped by the United Nations Security Council on November 14 and with the advent of winter.

Kabul releases 450 prisoners before Ramazan

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban released 450 prisoners from Kabul's main jail on Tuesday as a gesture a day before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramazan.

The prisoners, all adult males, were seen lined up outside the sprawling jail on the eastern edge of the city. Six coaches waited to take them away, as senior Taliban officials watched on.

The men were captured during fighting earlier this year north of Kabul or arrested in the capital, a senior Taliban security official told AFP.

'They were captured on the frontlines of Shamali and Tagab,' said Mawlawi Mohammad Yasin, head of the Third Security Department.

'Some of them were captured in Kabul while carrying out subversive activities and making contact with the opposition. They are all military and political prisoners,' he said, as he stood outside the jail on a dusty patch of ground littered with rusted tank bodies.

'These people were our opponents and we released them in honour of the holy month of Ramazan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is very sympathetic and kind to these people,' he said.

Taliban troops launched an offensive in July in the Shamali Plains, just north of the capital, and in nearby Tagab but were held back by opposition fighters.

The Taliban control Kabul and most of the country but opposition troops led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood are holding out in two northeastern provinces and in the Panjshir Valley, 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of the capital.

NATION

08 DEC 1999

Taliban deny existence of training camps

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: Taliban have assured Pakistan of closing down terrorist camps, if any, on their soil.

Taliban say they are unaware of such camps in Afghanistan but are ready to eliminate the same if identified by Pakistan, diplomatic sources told APP, here, on Monday.

The issue of terrorist training camps came to the limelight in the wake of acts of religious terrorism in various parts of the country in which a number of innocent people were killed a couple of months back, during the Nawaz government.

Taliban deny existence of any training camps on their soil while they are under intense US pressure to hand over Osama bin Laden who has been accused by the US of supporting terrorism.

Diplomatic sources said that before the US move to impose sanctions on Taliban, the P-5 ambassadors in the Federal Capital were told that sanctions on Taliban would not help deliver Osama bin Laden to the US authorities.

It is an old tradition of the Afghans not to extradite anybody seeking refuge in their soil, according to political scientists.

On the other hand, diplomatic observers believe that sanctions on the poverty-stricken Afghanistan will add to the miseries of the poor Afghans.

The contention is that sanctions had never achieved their objective in the past. The best way to have a moderating influence on Taliban, they contend, was to engage them rather than ostracize them.—APP

DAWN

07 DEC 1999

DAWN 10 DEC 1999

Taliban say they won't fight in Ramazan

KABUL, Dec 9: The Taliban said on Thursday they would not launch any fighting against opposition forces during Ramazan.

The Taliban control Kabul and most of the country, but are battling opposition troops who hold two northeastern provinces and the Panjsher Valley, 100 kilometres north of Kabul.

"We will not initiate fighting during Ramazan," said Mawlawi Masoom Janan, head of the Taliban commission for crossline operations.

In a rare agreement the Taliban and opposition forces have agreed to allow UN humanitarian convoys across the frontlines, 45 kilometres north of Kabul.

On Monday eight 15-ton UN World Food Programme trucks crossed into Gulbahar, at the mouth of the Panjsher, where wheat and clothes are being stored in an old German-run textile factory.

Twenty trucks crossed on Tuesday and another 12 on Thursday, said Isireli Dugu, the UN deputy field security officer in Afghanistan.

More crossings are expected on Friday and Saturday and discussions between the two sides will continue to allow more trucks over the frontlines, he said.

"It is progressing well," he said.—AFP

Taliban chief seeks list of ex-communists

KABUL, Dec 12: Taliban's supreme leader has ordered to identify government employees who won awards during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Taliban officials said on Sunday.

No explanation was given, prompting speculation that the request could herald a new purge.

The officials said Mullah Mohammad Omar had sent a decree to all government ministries seeking lists and files on civil and military employees who received awards under Soviet rule, which ended 10 years ago.

"The decree wants information related to those people who received letter of merit, medals and certificates...it is not known if a decision to purge these people will be taken or not," said Mawlavi Fazul Rahman, acting rector of Kabul University.

Shortly after seizing power in Kabul in September 1996, Omar offered an amnesty to communists or officials who served under 10-year Soviet rule from 1979.

But a year later a purge by the Taliban of ex-communists led to the sacking of hundreds of civil servants.

Mawlavi Rahman told Reuters that purge covered all notorious communist employees and there was no need to dismiss those who still worked for the Taliban.

"People who have stayed behind and work for a scanty Taliban salary are the ones whose hands are not stained in blood. We need these people," he told Reuters.

He said all ministries were busy drawing up lists of officials which would be sent to the Taliban's ruling council of ministers for discussion.

Some of Afghanistan's elite fled the country after the communist takeover and most of those who had been educated in Soviet bloc countries escaped in the civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

Many other educated people left after the Taliban seized power because of the movement's ban on women working or going to school.—Reuters

DAWN 13 DEC 1999

Taliban assure Pakistan of closing terrorist camps

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Taliban have assured Pakistan of closing down terrorist camps, if any, on their soil.

Taliban say they are unaware of such camps in Afghanistan but are ready to eliminate the same if pinpointed by Pakistan, diplomatic sources told this agency here on Monday.

The issue of terrorist training camps came to the limelight in the wake of terrorist incidents in various parts of Pakistan a couple of months back, during past regime.

Taliban deny existence of any training camps on their soil while they are under intense US pressure to hand over Osama bin Laden after accusing him of supporting terrorism. The diplomatic sources said that before the US move to impose sanctions on Taliban, the P-5 Ambassadors in the Federal Capital were told that slapping sanctions on Taliban would not help deliver Osama bin Laden to the US.

NATION 07 DEC 1999

NATION 19 DEC 1999

Taliban religious police jail beard-trimmers for 10 days

KABUL (AFP) - The head of Afghanistan's religious police said Saturday he is jailing men who trim their beards for up to 10 days.

Mawlawi Mohammad Salim Haqani, caretaker Minister for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, was quoted by the official Heywad daily as saying offenders are kept in a detention centre at the downtown ministry.

'It is a supervisory centre which is in fact like a religious school where a teacher has been assigned to ask them about prayers, ablution, beliefs and other religious issues,' he said.

'The rules prescribe 10 days in jail for trimming or shaving beard,' said the head of the Taliban's most feared organ.

The detention period is reduced if the detainees pass a test, he said, without specifying what it was.

Teams of religious police in Japanese-made jeeps regularly patrol the streets of this once liberal city.

The Taliban, which rose from Afghan and Pakistani Koranic schools five years ago, control Kabul and most of the country, and have imposed a strict interpretation of the Shariah law.

Women have been barred from work and education outside home, and ordered to cover themselves fully in public.

Men have been told to shun western dress and hairstyles. Photography of living objects, including video, music, and cinema, is strictly forbidden.

Responding to reports that male doctors have been jailed and beaten after female patients showed them their faces, Haqani said every Muslim woman had to wear the Hejab (veil) when facing strangers, including doctors.

The Taliban's supreme leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, has issued a decree asking women not to go to male doctors unless absolutely necessary, in which case they have to be accompanied by their male relatives, he said.

'During inspection, both the female patient and the doctor have to observe Islamic Hejab. The doctor has to only touch that part of the patient's body which has the problem and not to touch her other parts' he said, quoting the decree.

Male hospital doctors and nurses are forbidden from entering female wards unless they have to, and female doctors should wear old clothes and shun make-up and talking with male staff, he said.

'However, in case of need they can meet while observing the Hejab. Female doctors and nurses cannot enter the rooms of male patients.'

He warned that no other authority could stop his teams from checking hospitals and private clinics.

Haqani's men, armed with AK-47 assault rifles and leather whips, force local shopkeepers to attend five-time daily prayers in mosque congregations. Those who do not have their shops sealed off for five days.

The minister said Islamic scholars have said people who shirk prayers should be beaten until they start to bleed.

Kabul plans to purge civil servants

KABUL, Dec 14: Afghanistan's hardline Taliban plan to purge civil servants who received merit awards, did military training or studied in a socialist country during the former 14-year communist regime, official sources said on Tuesday.

The sources, requesting anonymity, added that the Taliban had ordered all government ministries and universities to prepare files on staff with alleged links to the former communist government.

Civil servants said the Taliban had asked for lists of anyone who received merit awards under the communist regime, who did military service or was educated in a socialist country.

They said special teams were currently working in various ministries and departments to complete the list of "unfavourable persons."

At Kabul University, about 85 people have been listed, most of them well-trained and experienced lecturers, one source said.

He said the purge would take place after getting lists from the universities of Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad.

Although no official word was yet available on the purpose of the purge, it appears the Taliban are keen to dismiss anyone trained by the communist regime which ruled Afghanistan from 1978 till 1992.

In 1996, when the Taliban took Kabul, they announced a general amnesty which covered communist functionaries too. But a year later they undertook a massive purge, getting rid of hundreds of civil servants.

Almost all pilots of the Taliban's ageing air force have been trained in socialist countries and some ex-communist military officers are serving in the ranks of the Taliban army. —AFP

NATION 15 DEC 1999

Taliban punish 39 beard-trimmers

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban religious police have punished 39 beard-trimmers here in recent days, the official Radio Shariat said Tuesday.

A number of people who did not attend the required prayers five times a day in the mosque and some drivers who were listening to music were also punished, the ruling militia's mouthpiece said.

'The mobile anti-vice teams of the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice this week invited people to deeds of virtue,' it said.

'Thirty-nine men who had trimmed their beards contrary to the Mohammadan Sharia were given Sharia punishment,' it added.

Though the station did not specify the penalty, the religious police minister Mawlawi Mohammad Salim Haqani has already said beard trimmers face up to 10 days in jail.

The crackdown comes in the middle of the Muslim holy month of Ramazan, when people must fast between dawn and dusk.

In an interview with the official Heywad daily published Tuesday, Haqani said his anti-sin teams were giving enforced haircuts to young men in Kabul sporting western hair-styles.

'Those boys who are doing their hair as per western fashion are captured and given proper haircuts in the nearest barber shops,' he said.

If young people are caught listening to music, they are held in the House of Juvenile Delinquents and freed after they have acquired proper 'ethics,' he said.

The Taliban have brought most of Afghanistan under their ultra-orthodox interpretation of the Islamic Shariah law, banning women from outside jobs and education and ordering men to grow untrimmed beards.

They have also forced women to have their bodies and faces fully covered when they venture out.

Haqani said women who have not complied to this order have been punished.

Male relatives or husbands of women who come out without proper coverings are found and also punished, he said.

'Otherwise, according to the rules given to our department by religious scholars...these women are threatened a bit, keeping in mind their honour,' he said.

Locals said that the religious police personnel armed with canes and leather whips beat women who show their faces and even ankles.

Haqani said last week those who shirk from offering their daily prayers should be beaten until they bleed.

He denied his men were harassing people.

'Our personnel who have special ID cards do not enter houses unless accompanied by the local village chief and allowed by the house owner,' Haqani said.

'Our department has come into being for the well-being and welfare of the people not their harassment.'

NATION 22 DEC 1999

Taliban set terms for talks with opposition

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia on Monday reiterated its readiness for talks with the opposition but demanded recognition as a pre-requisite, the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency reported.

" They (the anti-Taliban alliance) must first recognize our government before we resume dialogue with them," Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, the Taliban foreign minister, told the AIP.

The militia currently controls more than 90 per cent of Afghan territory, including the capital Kabul. Former defence minister Ahmed Shah Masood, who heads the northern opposition alliance, is restricted to a couple of northern provinces.

Internationally, only three countries - Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - recognize the Taliban government.

Muttawakil also offered a one-to-one exchange of prisoners of war.

According to independent estimates, the Taliban are holding 4,000 prisoners belonging to different opposition factions. The mainstream anti-Taliban faction, led by Masood, has about 500 Taliban fighters in its custody.

Muttawakil said the exchange of prisoners could start with the release of non-combatant prisoners, but the opposition has yet to respond to the offer because it wants the process to begin with regular fighters.—dpa

NATION 21 DEC 1999

Taliban ask Annan to allow Ariana to fly to S. Arabia

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban have complained that 250 Afghans have been stranded at an airport in Saudi Arabia because of UN sanctions against the ruling religious administration, officials said Tuesday.

In a message to the UN Security Council, Taliban's Foreign Minister Mawlawi Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel asked the United Nations not to delay any longer the formation of the special committee to evaluate the humanitarian and religious impacts of the UN sanctions.

'Also, there are 250 countrymen waiting in the Saudi Arabia airport to be transported back home,' the message said, adding that most of them are in critical health conditions and some have already died due to lack of health care.

UN aviation and financial sanctions were imposed on the Taliban in November because they refused to hand over indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden, wanted for two US embassy bombings in Africa last year.

Many Afghans are now keen to go to Saudi Arabia to perform the Umra, a form of pilgrimage to Makkah, Mutawakel said.

'The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan firmly asks the UN to form this committee soon so that the Ariana Afghan Airlines planes can take people to Saudi Arabia for Umra and bring back those Afghans who are waiting to come back at the airport,' it added.

'If the UN does not allow Ariana flights to Saudi Arabia, in fact it violates its own charter,' it said.

The UN sanctions carry exemptions for humanitarian flights and the annual Muslim Haj flights. Otherwise the Taliban-owned Ariana is not allowed to fly overseas.

NATION

0 8 DEC 1999

Omar warns UN chief

PESHAWAR, Nov 30: Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar on Tuesday threatened to forcibly take UN officials to the frontlines of its war with rival Afghan groups "to see the truth" unless UN chief Kofi Annan withdrew charges that children under 14 were fighting for Taliban.

Omar, speaking by telephone from his headquarters in Kandahar, said he was giving Annan until Wednesday to withdraw the child soldier recruitment accusation he made on Monday in a report.

"There are no children under 14 in our ranks," Omar said.

He said he was inviting UN officials to visit Taliban frontlines to see for themselves. Asked what the Taliban would do if the UN officials refused to go, Omar said:

"Unless he (Annan) withdraws this charge by tomorrow evening, we will compel them to accompany us, and take them to the frontlines so they could see what is the truth and what is falsehood."—Reuters

Women in Afghanistan enjoy great respect

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Taliban envoy to the United Nations Maulvi Abdul Hakim Mujahid has said, women in Afghanistan enjoy great respect and dignity and nobody can dare caste an evil eye on them.

In an interview with Voice of America (VOA) he said, the UN General Assembly has signed international human rights declaration fifty-one years ago. But it can be said with pride and dignity that the rights laid down in the declaration had been provided to humanity by Islam in the light of Quran and Sunnah fourteen hundred years ago.

He said, "We are opposed to two articles of the declaration because they are repugnant to Islam.

The first and second articles of international human rights declaration lay stress that all humanbeings are born equal in dignity and rights. Islam also gives equal rights to all the humanbeings. However we are apposed to article 17 and 12.

The article 16 gives the right to a woman to marry anyone irrespective of religion when she becomes adult. But the Holy Quran says that a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim. Article 12 gives the right to conversion to other religion. But a Muslim cannot abandon his religion, if he does so, he is called infidel."

Taliban have never violated human rights in Afghanistan he said and added some countries are levelling false and baseless allegations against the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan.

Mujahid said he was scheduled to meet the President of the Security Council on Thursday but regrettably, the appointment was cancelled because the members of the Security Council had not allowed him to meet him. He wanted to discuss with him the issue of Afghan Ariana Airlines, he added.

NATION

1 3 DEC 1999

Taliban are as defiant as ever over Osama issue

IN the chilly corridors of power, Taliban officials huddled around space haters are as defiant as ever about the cause of Osama bin Laden, the wealthy Saudi fugitive whose alleged terrorist attacks and continued sanctuary in Afghanistan have led to United Nations economic sanctions against the impoverished nation.

"The United States wants us to tie Osama bin Laden's hands and send him to them as a gift," Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil said. "We are ready to talk on all issues. We have offered to have him tried here, or to have other Muslim countries judge him. But how can we give them a human being as a gift, especially if his crime has not been proven?"

Mr Muttawakil said week that he expects only minor long-term impact from the UN sanctions, which have grounded all foreign flights by Afghanistan's only airline and frozen assets abroad of the ruling Taliban movement since they took effect November 14. He declared that Allah will protect the Afghan people from hardship at foreign hands.

"Every few years the United States looks for someone new to hate," Mr Muttawakil said. "Before it was Libya and Iraq; now it is Afghanistan's turn. But if they try to harm us, they will gain nothing. Almighty God always accepts the prayers of the innocent and defends those who are trampled upon."

But on the frozen streets of the capital, where families shiver in bread lines or spend the days collecting firewood to burn for warmth, the traditional Afghan welcome for Mr bin Laden, a once-revered Muslim guest, seems to be wearing thin.

Mohammed Taj, 45, a labourer waiting in line for his daily bread ration, said: "It is our custom to be hospitable to guests, but we would also like Osama to leave because of all the innocent people. The people with power will support themselves, and the sanctions will only hurt the poor. America should have more mercy, but the mullahs must solve this problem with the United Nations, too." Many Afghan people blame the United States and its allies for imposing new economic hardships on them. Buildings occupied by UN employees in six Afghan cities were stonned or burned by mobs, even though they provide most food and medical aid to the country.

"We are a weak country now, and America is trying to keep us that way," said Abdul Razaq, 30, a father of five who earns $4 per month as a night watchman. "This is the time they should be helping us, but instead they are aiming these cruel actions against us because of one man."

Mr bin Laden, an Islamic extremist who has reportedly maintained a base in Afghanistan for several years, is believed by US officials in Washington to have planned and financed the bombings of two US embassies in East Africa in August 1998, in which 224 people died. Later that month, the United States carried out a cruise missile attack against Afghan training camps thought to be under his control.

Since then, Taliban officials have offered to prosecute or monitor Mr bin Laden, but they have refused US demands to turn him over for trial. In retaliation, Washington banned all US trade and investment with Afghanistan, and in October the UN Security Council threatened further sanctions if the regime did not comply. When it did not, the sanctions took effect.

Although they do not prohibit food imports, medical relief or trade between Afghanistan and its customary partners in nearby Muslim countries, the sanctions have come at a time of multiple hardships here. A drought caused a poor wheat harvest this autumn, Pakistan's new military government has cracked down on unregulated trade, and winter has struck this war-scarred, largely heatless capital with unexpected ferocity.

In addition, the flight ban obliges people to travel to Pakistan to pick up cash mailed from relatives abroad, a major source of income in a country where most people do not have jobs.

Some in Kabul accused the United States last week of being hypocritical in its pursuit of Mr bin Laden, an important figure in financing the Afghan resistance against occupying Soviet troops during the 1980s. The United States heavily backed that resistance, but after the Taliban militia seized Kabul in 1996 and imposed harsh Islamic laws, Washington turned against the regime. Now, efforts to capture Mr bin Laden have depressed relations further.

"For America, bin Laden was an angel when he was in the holy war against the Soviets, but now they say he is a spy and a terrorist," Mohammed Mirwaiz, a student at Kabul University, said. "Many people who did atrocities here during the war are allowed to live in the United States. Why cannot we ask for them to be turned over to us?"

Mr Muttawakil said the United States "is known as the world's policeman, but now those police are killing our people with missiles and hunger." He added: "I don't know if Osama bin Laden is a hero or not. But now the United States has made him into a big hero."–*Washington Post.*

NATION 09 DEC 1999

Taliban want full eradication of drugs, says Hakeem

NATION 14 DEC 1999

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Taliban representative to the United Nations Abdul Hakeem Mujahid has said that Taliban's policy is to completely eradicate drug production, trafficking and its consumption.

Talking in CNN's Question -Answer programme on Monday he said, there does exist some problem to ban poppy cultivation but Taliban are ready to end poppy cultivation in one year if there is cooperation by UN and big countries.

He said it is a centuries old problem and they cannot end it overnight.

The situation in Afghanistan is much better than it was before.

Taliban have disarmed 90% of the country's territory which the United Nations wanted by purchasing arms from individuals. They have brought peace and security in the country which all the neighbouring countries wanted.

We have established an Islamic government which the political parties of the country had failed to do despite their claims, Hakeem said.

He said it is unfortunate that, inspite of appreciating the Taliban, the political parties have resorted to rebellion against them. They are fighting among each other in the small areas which they possess while there exists complete peace and tranquillity in 90 % area under Talibans control, he added.

He said restoration of peace in Afghanistan is not only in the interest of country itself but also in the interest of region and the entire world community.

The Islamic government does not want to create any problem with the neighbouring countries he said, adding also with the world community particularly the big countries.

But the world community and the big countries have chosen a different approach in their dealing with the Taliban. They have not recognised the legitimate government of Taliban, he regretted.

He said, in Afghanistan all kinds of religious and political activities are allowed and Taliban are working under the 1964 constitution except omitting the chapter of Kingdom from it, he added.

"We will work according to the will of Afghan people because we value it very much " Hakeem stressed.

To a question, he said the issue of Afghan women's right is being politicised and exaggerated in the West. Women in Afghanistan have the same rights as men.

They are half body of Afghan nation. They can do every thing in accordance with the constitution and Islamic teachings.

He said, the women who were appointed on various jobs by the previous governments are still holding their posts and are being paid their salaries. Thousands of Afghan women are working. They are administrators, chief accountants, doctors, medical officers, nurses, teachers, professors and even police officers. So there is no truth in the propaganda carried by the western media, he maintained.

No Chechen exile govt in Afghanistan, say Taliban

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban on Tuesday dismissed reports that Chechen leaders planned to form a government in exile in Afghanistan.

A Taliban foreign ministry statement dubbed reports which have appeared in the Russian mass media as Moscow's machinations aimed at demoralizing Chechen fighters. 'In this connection, neither the Chechen government authorities have contacted the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan nor is this report correct,' it added.

The statement described the Chechen crisis as a universal Muslim issue and deplored the silence of the international community, particularly the Islamic countries regarding 'this aggression'.

The Taliban, which have established an ultra-puritanical Islamic rule in most of Afghanistan including its capital Kabul, do not hide their sympathy with Chechen fighters. Last month, the Supreme Taliban Leader. Mulla Mohammad Omar offered a truce to his northern-based opponents led by ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood so that both Afghan rival factions could together help the Chechen fighters.

The Russian people have been deceived by 'belligerents' in the Kremlin as they were deceived during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in December 1978, it added.

'The developments which started from Moscow bomb blasts until now are part of a drama to deceive the Russian public opinion,' the statement said, adding Russian Prime Minister Vladmir Putin was seeking to replace President Boris Yeltsin at the cost of thousands of lives. It predicted the Chechen war would last for years, leaving innumerable Russian mothers to mourn the death of their sons.

'After Afghanistan, Chechnya will be another bleeding wound on Russia's body and the Russians' gain in this war will be like their gain in Afghanistan's war,' it said.

Russian troops pulled out of Afghanistan after 10 years of occupation, losing around 15,000 soldiers killed in a humiliating defeat. The statement attacked the Russian mass media for labelling the Taliban and their 'welcomed guest' terrorist suspect Osama bin Laden as 'upholders of terrorism' inside Russia and Chechnya.

It said the Kremlin wanted to boost the morale of their soldiers and to justify their 'horrific crimes' in the western public opinion.

NATION 15 DEC 1999

Women, child rights fully protected in Afghanistan: Mutawakel

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Taliban Foreign Minister Maulvi Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel has termed the comments and assertions being made with regard to situation in Afghanistan particularly human rights situation as baseless and false.

In an interview with VOA he said, Hillary Clinton has been invited to visit Afghanistan to personally see facts and situation there.

He said, "the United States and some other governments at times use some international principles and human issues as a political tactic. They have adopted double standard. Earlier, they levelled allegations of the recruitment of children which was rejected by the eyewitnesses and UN officials.

Mutawakel said, anyone who wants to know the miseries and hardships of the Afghans, should witness the realities instead of relying blindly on the propaganda of the enemies.

He said, "I believe that if they are really concerned about the plight of women in Afghanistan, they should come and see by themselves. But if their objections and criticism are politically motivated, they may not accept the invitation".

When asked that a number of people reportedly affiliated with Osama Bin Laden have been arrested in the middle East, Mutawakel said that the US government is raising these issues to justify their deeds. "Such remarks and statements are aimed at justifying their brutal decisions like imposition of sanctions on Afghanistan but the Afghans and the world people do understand it.

He said, "The US embassy has handed over a memorandum to our embassy containing baseless allegations and claims or threats to Afghanistan. I think, if they really have proofs and evidences, they should submit it and hold direct talks with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

"So far as the arrest of some unknown persons from unknown places and unknown confession is concerned, this is just pressure tactics, otherwise, they do not have any proof and evidence to convince the people to accept their authenticity. We are fully convinced that neither bin Laden nor anybody else can use the Afghan soil against others" he said.

Mutawakel also criticised the United Nations saying it is not implementing its decision regarding non-inclusion of humanitarian and religious issue in the sanction. "It is very strange that a decision that goes against a nation is taken and implemented in haste but delaying tactics are used in other issues," he noted. Commenting on increase in wheat and flour prices in a number of Afghan provinces particularly Kabul, Mutawakel said that they have asked the United Nations to provide assistance to the displaced Afghans of Shomali now living in Kabul as it did with the refugees in Panjsher.

He, however, said that they have not yet received any considerable aid. "We have held talks with the UN officials in Kabul and other areas asking them to provide even-handed and indiscriminate aid to the people of Afghanistan. They should also extend some help in maintaining stability of prices. They had announced food aid and other announcements like opening of Iran-Afghan border and agreement with Pakistan. These had very positive impacts. We do not have problems in western areas of Afghanistan. Prices are still stable to great extend in most parts of Afghanistan and we face some problems only in Kabul. The problems could be resolved if the routes are open and wheat arrives in Afghanistan".

On the closure of Afghan banks in Pakistan, the Taliban FM said so far as the issue of the closure of the banks in Pakistan is concerned, in fact there are no official Afghan banks and only Customs missions were operative in Karachi, Peshawar and Chaman and they do not have the status of banks.

Taliban delegation may visit Iran

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel has said that a delegation of the Taliban may visit Iran to hold talks with the Iranian authorities on the issue of refugees.

In an interview with BBC he said, during the visit talks on facilitating the return of the refugees may possibly be held if agreed upon.

He denied the reports about the visit of any Iranian delegation saying so far no Iranian delegation has arrived in Afghanistan to hold high level talks. Only the Iranian Consul and some Iranian companies, which want to make investment in Herat or other Afghan cities, held negotiations with local authorities in Herat. No talks other than this have taken place, he said.

Asked when the Iranian companies visited Afghanistan and in which sectors and areas, they want to invest, he said, this is an attempt by the public. The people of Iran and Afghanistan have joint ventures. A company has worked for years in telephone sector in Herat and it had to bear fruits. They want agreement and consensus in some other sectors as well.

To a question regarding implementation of sanctions by Pakistan, he said the United States, which does not have any logic and argument, is not tolerating the will of the Afghans or the enforcement of Islamic system in Afghanistan. "We and Pakistan are neighbouring countries and there exists no concern in Pakistan about Islamic revolution in Afghanistan. Pakistan has good relations with the people and Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and these ties would continue."he anticipated. So far as the implementation of the sanctions is concerned, it applies on the member countries and Pakistan is also one of the UN members, he said.

NATION 16 DEC 1999

Taliban Can ------

first cache of weapons. So when the Taliban marched into the Afghan capital of Kabul in 1996, Bashar was well placed to benefit. He moved his labs from Pakistan to Kandahar, and began driving around the city in black Land Cruiser.

Smugglers buy opium at large bazaars that are the treacherous domain of criminal syndicates. One of the more infamous markets is located in the town of Sangin, a three-hour drive west of Kandahar. Bernard Farhi, head of the Islamabad office of the UN drug-control agency, visited there in October. Of about 500 shopkeepers crowded along one main street and two or three footpaths off it, he says, almost half sell opium. In front of shops they have scales, and inside they keep wet opium in plastic bags and dry opium stacked in large cakes. "One trader told me he sold 28,000 kilos of opium last year," says Frahi – earning the merchant gross revenue of about $132,000. "Sangin is known as a dangerous place. It is known for people going in and not coming out."

Even more dangerous are the border areas with Iran, Tajikistan and Pakistan. The United Nations is helping to create a drug-control agency in Tajikistan, while Iran is fighting what amounts to a war of attribution – by Tehran's count, drug traffickers have killed more than 2,650 Iranian security personnel since 1983. In early November, more than 30 Iranian guards were killed in a single battle with a drug convoy. "The drug threat doesn't recognise politics, boundaries or cultures," says Vladimir Fenopetov, who oversees UN drug-control programs in Central Asia.

Leading European officials are bracing for a potential surge in heroin supply. "This will ... have a direct and immediate impact on the streets of our cities and towns," British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook warned last month. To help block the inflow, Britain has provided 300,000 Pounds to Iran to buy bulletproof vests for its border guards. It's also expecting aggressive marketing by dealers. "There could be more free samples on offer (to expand the consumer pool", says British drug czar Keith Hallawell. In France, authorities are worried about the purity of the Afghan heroin. "There could be a lot of overdoses," says Alain Labrousse of the Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues in Paris. Some European drug experts, however, point out that heroin consumption in Europe is stable – leading them to predict that Afghanistan's surplus might go elsewhere.

Given the Taliban's often harsh anti-Western rhetoric, some critics in the West wonder if the Taliban might have an ulterior motive in its drug policy – poisoning "infidels." But the truth is that Afghan drugs likely are harming at least as many Muslims as they are non-Muslims. In Pakistan, addicts either shoot up or "chase the dragon" by smoking opium, and Iran has a swelling population of more than a million drug abusers.

Afghanistan, ironically, is better off than most countries in the region. Althouogh addiction is a problem in parts of the country, it's outlawed and not widespread, so opium farmers don't often see the human effects of their trade. "Afghanistan is a poor, landlocked country," says Ghulam Hazrat, who once worked as a high-school literature teacher, but now grows opium popies on his family's 100 acres. "In these past 20 years, the land wasn't tilled right. Schools didn't operate. The roads became bad. The only thing we have is opium."

Other Afghan farmers say they'd be pleased to grow something else if they could make a dependable living from it.

Sher Khan, a 28-year-old farmer in the village of Ghas Ge, planted his poppy crop three weeks ago on his modest acre-and-a-half field. He won't get rich from it, but by Afghan standards he'll do quite well – $3,000 to $4,000 by current prices. "The government promised to give us subsidised fertilizer and seed to grow wheat," he said recently, as he plucked a green seedling from the earth. "But it never came. So we must grow opium." The sprouts of Khan's good fortune are, for many around the globe, a growing nightmare.–*Newsweek.*

NATION

14 DEC 1999

Afghan minister hits out at US over Osama warning

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban rulers Thursday slammed the United State's warning that it would hold the Islamic militia responsible for any future anti-American attacks by alleged terrorist Osama.

'We have received the American message which is nothing but a ruse to cover up its hostile acts against Afghanistan,' the Afghan Islamic Press quoted Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel as saying.

Speaking to the Pakistan-based news agency from Kandahar in Afghanistan, Mutawakel said the US stand was 'strange and unreasonable' and said they had never provided any evidence to support their allegations against bin Laden.

The warning was delivered this week by US special coordinator for fighting anti-American terrorism, Michael Sheehan, to the Taliban's New York representative, Abdul Hakim Mujahid.

'Ambassador Sheehan stated emphatically that the United States will hold the Taliban responsible for any terrorist attacks that are carried out by bin Laden's network,' State Department spokesman James Foley said in Washington Tuesday.

Mutawakel said it was illogical to pin the blame on bin Laden, who is living in Afghanistan, for any anti-American activity anywhere in the world.

'They (US) are after Osama while they have no proof with them against him,' he said.

Bin Laden is wanted by a US court for two US embassy bombings in East Africa last year which killed 224 people. But the Taliban insist he is innocent and refuse to hand him over for trial.

Mutawakel also expressed displeasure over an official statement in Amman on the arrest of 13 Arabs, mostly Jorandians, who Jordan said had received training in Afghanistan and were plotting terrorist attacks.

The arrested Arabs may have got training during the anti-Soviet resistance war in Afghanistan, the Taliban foreign minister said.

NATION 17 DEC 1999

Taliban accuse US of propaganda war

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Thursday said they were victims of a US propaganda war and insisted they were against terrorism.

The Islamic militia, who control most of the country, protested the US State Department's warning that it would hold the Taliban responsible for any terrorist attacks by Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden, a billionaire Saudi dissident, is wanted in the United States for the bombings of two US embassies in East Africa last year in which 224 people were killed.

'The US government has long been accusing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan for various reasons and has launched a serious propaganda war against our war-torn country,' a Taliban foreign ministry statement said.

'The IEA Foreign Ministry spokesman vehemently dismisses the untrue and baseless allegations of the US Foreign Ministry and declares that we are against staging any terrorist activities the world over,' it said.

Hillary invited to visit Afghanistan

KABUL, Dec 14: The Taliban have invited Hillary Clinton to visit Afghanistan to find out the truth about rights for women in the war-torn country, official sources said on Tuesday.

A foreign ministry statement run by official Radio Shariat said the US First Lady could come to Afghanistan and talk with local women to see for herself that there are no women rights violations in the Taliban areas.

"We invite Mrs Clinton to visit Afghanistan and to closely talk with Afghan women on women rights in order to get familiar with the realities of the Afghan society and to be convinced that women rights are being observed here as never before," the statement said.

The Taliban uphold the women's rights, it said, adding the religious militia's supreme Leader Mulla Mohammad Omar has issued several decrees for their improvement.

The Taliban are accused by the west of exercising "gender apartheid".

One could not compare the status of women's rights in Afghanistan with the United States, it said, adding that 140,000 women are "bestially treated" in American prisons.

It accused the Clintons of doing nothing to upgrade American women rights.

"Comparing women's rights in America and Afghanistan, one could right away see to what an extent women are being insulted under the American democratic government," it noted.

The statement run by the official Radio Shariat on Tuesday morning came after the US administration last week issued a factsheet detailing its humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

The US statement said: "The Taliban movement has severely restricted the rights of women and girls."

But the Taliban said on Tuesday that it did not want to be enemies with anyone, it added.

"On the contrary, we are holding out a hand of friendship, within Islam, to the world and hope this sincere hand is warmly pressed by the international community," the statement concluded. —AFP

DAWN 15 DEC 1999

Taliban deny plan to attack Americans

DAWN 22 DEC 1999

By Hasan Akhtar

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: Taliban militia communicated its strong denial to the United States embassy here on Tuesday that either it planned to carry out anti-American attacks or permit Osama bin Laden to launch any such attacks from the Afghan territory.

Newly-appointed envoy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Moulvi Sayed Mohammad Haqqani told a crowded press conference here that the communication to the US embassy was in response to a letter sent by Washington on December 13 through the Emirate's representatives in New York and Islamabad.

"Neither Kabul will launch any terrorist attacks on the US nor will it permit the use of its soil for terrorism," declared the ambassador.

The United States had warned Afghanistan's ruling Taliban that it would hold them responsible for any terrorist activities of Osama bin Laden and his aides. The American warning to Kabul was delivered in New York by the US State Department.

US fears attacks by Osama bin Laden or his supporters against Americans or US installations during Christmas and New Millennium celebrations later this month.

Rejecting the US government's accusations against Osama, wanted by Washington on charges of masterminding attacks on US embassies in Africa last year, and the Taliban leadership, charged of planning terrorist attacks and harbouring terrorists by the US, the Afghan envoy reiterated that his country strongly condemned terrorism and remained ready to cooperate with the world community over the issue.

The Afghan ambassador also reaffirmed that Osama was "just a guest" of theirs who had come to Afghanistan before the Taliban took over the government in Kabul in 1996.

Maulvi Haqqani said that Osama "cannot act against anyone" and added that he had been deprived of means of liaison, including telecommunication facilities.

The ambassador, however, denied when a reporter asked if Osama was held incommunicado as a "hostage". Osama is a "free man", Haqqani declared.

The ambassador said with regard to Osama, the Emirate government had offered a fair Islamic trial in a Shariah court. He said three judges from other Muslim countries could also be co-opted into the court. They could place bin Laden under the direct supervision of the OIC.

Reuters add: The US warned the Taliban on December 13 after Jordan arrested 13 men who it said were in the early stages of planning "terrorist" operations in the kingdom after receiving military training in Afghanistan.

Last week, Pakistan also extradited to Amman an arrested Jordanian man, Khalil al-Deek.

The Taliban told Washington in its letter that it had no knowledge about the arrests or whether the arrested men had made any confessions, Haqqani said.

NATION 21 DEC 1999

Taliban warn Iran against aiding opposition

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20: Taliban militia on Monday warned Tehran against giving support to the Afghan Opposition Alliance, the Peshawar-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency reported.

"Iran should either rescind its earlier stand during the Mujahideen's anti-communism jehad or stop supporting renegade communists like General Rashid Dostum," Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil, the Taliban foreign minister, told the AIP.

"Dostum is a confessed communist and thus acceptable neither to the Afghan people nor should he be acceptable to Iranians who extended all sort of support to the Muslim fighters," Mutawakil said, while urging Tehran to stay away from the opposition alliance.

The warning came as former president Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Uzbek warlord Dostum, who abandoned the socialist regime in April 1992 to join the Mujahideen, were both in Iran.

Rabbani, ousted by the Taliban in September 1996, has also been in Tehran for talks with Iranian leaders to solicit their support for an end to the conflict.—DPA

Kabul hits back on warning

ISLAMABAD, Dec 16: The Taliban on Thursday slammed the United State's warning that it would hold them responsible for any anti-American attacks by Osama bin Laden.

"We have received the American message which is nothing but a ruse to cover up its hostile acts against Afghanistan," the Afghan Islamic Press quoted Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel as saying.

Speaking to the Pakistan-based news agency from Kandahar, Mutawakel said the United States stand was "strange and unreasonable" and said they had never provided any evidence to support their allegations against bin Laden.

Mutawakel said it was illogical to pin the blame on bin Laden, who is living in Afghanistan, for any anti-American activity anywhere in the world. "They (US) are after Osama while they have no proof with them against him," he said.

Mutawakel also expressed displeasure over an official statement in Amman on the arrest of 13 Arabs, mostly Jordanians, who Jordan said had received training in Afghanistan and were plotting terrorist attacks.

The detainees may have got training during the anti-Soviet resistance war in Afghanistan, he said.—AFP

DAWN 17 DEC 1999

NATION 24 DEC 1999

Taliban offer to hold talks with Tehran

TEHRAN (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia have offered to hold negotiations with neighbouring Iran, which backs the Afghan opposition, a Tehran paper reported on Thursday.

'We are ready to hold talks with Iran in any place and at any time Iran chooses,' Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel told his Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharazi, according to sources quoted in the *Tehran Times*. The English-language daily, which is considered generally well-informed on matters of state, did not specify when Mutawakel had sent the letter to Kharazi.

The report comes as ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, toppled by the Islamic Taliban in 1996, finished four days of talks here with Iranian officials as well as members of the Afghan opposition.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami on Tuesday reiterated Tehran's call for a coalition government in Afghanistan, which would include the opposition, in order to put an end to the vicious civil war that has rocked the country.

Rabbani arrived just days after a visit by General Pervez Musharraf, the new military strongman in Pakistan, which is one of only three nations — along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — to recognise the Taliban government.

Iran's relations with the Taliban improved last month after Teheran opened its eastern borders for the Afghan ruling militia to import badly needed food.

Iran allowed convoys of food across the border after UN aviation and financial sanctions imposed last month over the Taliban's refusal to extradite Osama bin Laden, wanted in connection with the deadly bombings of US embassies in Africa last year.

NATION 24 DEC 1999

Taliban term US fears of Osama attack baseless

ISLAMABAD (NNI) – Afghanistan ruling Taliban on Friday rejected the United States fears that Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden has plans to attack American citizens and installations on the eve of new year, saying Washington has launched a baseless propaganda against the Taliban.

"The US apprehensions about Osama are totally baseless," Afghan ambassador Maulvi Seyed Mohammad Haqqani told NNI. He said the American government wants to mislead world through a propaganda war against the "Afghan Islamic Emirate".

"Washington wants to hide its defective policies. The US should not impose its illegal decisions and unjustified ideas on others. We hope that the US citizens will not be misled by the American government propaganda campaign."

The envoy regretted that the US State Department spokesman James Foley has doubted the Taliban announcement that they have withdrawn all communications facilities to Osama Bin Laden and that he is living in Afghanistan as guest.

"The US did not accept our plea that Osama cannot use Afghan soil against anyone. The US official is giving out of context exaggerated reports that Osama is planning attacks on Americans on the eve of new year celebrations."

He said the Taliban still stand by their stance that Osama is a guest in Afghanistan. "He will not be allowed to use Afghan territory against anyone. We have withdrawn all communications facilities including fax and telephone for the satisfaction of international community. We are satisfied that Osama is not involved in terrorist activities."

The envoy said the Taliban renew proposal that an OIC delegation should monitor Osama's activities to allay US apprehensions. "They could see the Saudi exile has no communications facilities."

The envoy said Afghanistan is against terrorism, adding that the country itself has been victim of terrorism. "The recent blast in Kandahar and Kabul are proof of terrorism in Afghanistan."

Taliban demand $25,000 landing charges from India

NEW DELHI (NNI) - The Taliban authorities Thursday sought $US 25,000 from India as landing charges for the aircraft which flew to Kandahar with a relief team for the hostages.

Quoting official sources, PTI reported that the Taliban authorities had conveyed this to the Indian delegation, which has gone to Kandahar to negotiate the release of passengers of IC-814 hijacked last Friday.

NATION

31 DEC 1999

Taliban say time running out for India

KANDAHAR (AFP) - Time is running out for India to resolve the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight, the Afghan Taliban foreign minister told reporters Monday.

'India should not delay negotiations to resolve the crisis. It could cause damage and loss of life,' Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said at Kandahar airport.

'Any delay in this emergency is not advisable.'

Mutawakel was talking just before a team of Indian negotiators landed in Kandahar hoping to secure the release of the 160 passengers and crew still on board the aircraft now parked at the city's airport in southern Afghanistan.

'The Taliban are still patient. Afghanistan is already a victim of propaganda.

'We condemn all terrorism and we do not want to get involved or be blamed by anyone over the incident,' he said.

'India holds the key to a solution of the crisis. We leave it to India and the United Nations.'

Mutawakel repeated earlier warnings to the hijackers that Afghan commandos would storm the plane if they started killing anybody on the plane.

He said Afghanistan would not allow any Indian military action on its soil to end the hijacking.

Taliban to storm plane if hijackers kill passengers

Afghanistan's Taliban militia Monday warned they would storm a hijacked Indian airliner if five Muslim militants carried out a threat to start killing the 160 hostages on board.

'This warning was given to the hijackers after they told the control tower they had tied the hands and feet of two hostages and that they would kill them and throw their bodies out of the plane,' said Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel.

'They were clearly told Taliban commandos will storm the plane if there was any violence or unusual noises heard from the plane,' he told AFP at Kandahar airport, where the plane has been parked on the tarmac since Christmas Day.

Taliban commandos had already taken up positions, he said, as the warning was relayed to the men who hijacked the Indian Airlines jet en route from Kathmandu to New Delhi on Christmas Eve.

The dramatic hijacking was Monday in its fourth day, with the remaining 160 passengers and crew having already spent three nights on board. One passenger has been stabbed to death, allegedly for peeking at the hijackers through some makeshift blindfolds.

The hijackers earlier set a deadline of 0830 GMT for their demands for the release of a Pakistani Muslim cleric held by India to be met.

As the 0830 GMT deadline passed without incident, a Taliban spokesman Haroon Rashid said the diplomat's presence could help to ease the standoff.

The hijackers 'had given a three-hour deadline to the Indian authorities to take concrete steps otherwise they would kill the hostages,' he said.

'Now that deadline is over but so far no one has been apparently killed.

'It is good that the Indians have arrived now they can take over the talks directly. Food, water and medicines are regularly served to the plane,' he told AFP.

Both the Afghan militia and Pakistan have criticised India for not moving faster to end the four-day crisis.

NATION

28 DEC 1999

NATION 08 DEC 1999

Afghan warring factions sit down for rare deal

NO MAN'S LAND, Afghanistan (AFP) - They came from both sides and sat cross-legged in a circle in the middle of the road. Around them lay no man's land, dividing the frontlines north of the Afghan capital Kabul.

The four bearded men from the ruling Taliban regime and the four from their sworn enemy the opposition alliance greeted each other like old friends and agreed the final details of a rare deal.

For the first time the two sides allowed a UN convoy to take food and clothes from the capital, across the frontlines 40 kilometres further north and into the Panjshir Valley.

In the valley, a stronghold of opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood, tens of thousands fled from the summer fighting in their villages, which lie in the Shamali Plains a fertile stretch of fields between the capital and the valley. Some have managed to return home and start life again, but up to 60,000 remain. Many of them have no homes to go back to and rely on the United Nations and other aid agencies for food and shelter.

In the first convoy Monday the UN World Food Programme brought eight 15-tonne lorries, laden with 90 tonnes of wheat, 11,000 sweaters and 100 jackets.

Larger convoys with 20 trucks each have been given permission to cross for the next three days from Tuesday, delivering a total 750 tonnes of wheat.

'It's a great achievement,' said Jacques Collignon, logistics coordinator at the UN World Food Programme.

For now the food is being stored in an old-German run textile factory in Gulbahar, close to the entrance to the Panjshir. From there it will be driven up into the valley and handed out.

'It is important that we distribute it to the right people,' said Elaine Duthoit, of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian and Development Activities in Afghanistan.

'We want to start preparing before the winter really comes.'

For the convoy the two-hour journey was easily done, travelling north across the front along the New Road, a cement road built during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s and pockmarked by the odd landmine blast. North of the battlezone and beyond the New Road, the route is hard going but lined by mud and brick huts, home to hundreds of people mending bicycles and repairing their Russian-built motorcycles.

Several injured in Kabul blast

KABUL, Dec 5: Several people were wounded on Sunday when a Taliban small arms depot exploded, scattering live fire into nearby residential areas, witnesses said.

They said the blast happened in a Taliban arms cache located close to the Kabul sports stadium.

Two vehicles were seen rushing the wounded, some in critical condition, to nearby hospitals. It was not yet clear whether they were Taliban militia.

Residents said the explosion occurred after fire brigade personnel tried to extinguish a fire at the depot.

"It happened when they were trying to hose the fire down," one local said.

The explosion, which was audible in many parts of the Afghan war-torn capital, sent up a big cloud of smoke.—AFP

DAWN

06 DEC 1999

Several hurt in Kabul blast

KABUL (AFP) - Several people were wounded Sunday when a Taliban small arms depot exploded, scattering live fire into nearby residential areas, witnesses said. They said the blast happened in a Taliban arms cache located close to the Kabul sports stadium. Two vehicles were seen rushing the wounded, some in critical condition, to nearby hospitals. It was not yet clear whether they were Taliban soldiers. Residents said the explosion occurred after fire brigade personnel tried to extinguish a fire at the depot. 'It happened when they were trying to hose the fire down,' one local said. The explosion, which was audible in many parts of the Afghan war-torn capital, sent up a big cloud of smoke.

NATION

06 DEC 1999

Flights of frustration for Afghan airline

By Pamela Constable

KABUL: Striding across the tarmac in their worn black uniforms with gold trim, the captain and crew of the Ariana Afghan Airlines flight exude a frayed dignity. It is one of the few remaining assets of this dying airline, which has been virtually grounded by international sanctions and domestic hardships.

With its only Boeing 747 stranded in Kuwait on orders of the United Nations, Ariana's active fleet is down to five aging, Soviet-built Antonov 24 propeller planes, which make irregular and often delayed flights between Kabul, the capital, and three other cities in Afghanistan.

To fly Ariana has become an exercise in faith and frustration. At ticket offices, nothing is computerized and seats become available or sold out mysteriously. The Kabul airport is a frozen, lightless hangar filled with milling, anxious passengers heaving bulky parcels and shouting at a counter agent who cannot see to write. Flight information boards, with Russian letters, stopped working long ago.

As one early morning flight prepares to depart for Herat, a city near the border with Iran, the few female passengers, all draped in head-to-toe veils, are herded into a small waiting room. The women huddle on benches for warmth. One hour becomes two.

Finally, a policewoman enters. She roots carefully through wallets and envelopes and finally extracts a forbidden item: a packet of snapshots that include images of men. As she pores over them, the passenger, a middle-aged teacher who speaks some English, murmurs a protest. "My brother," she explains to a foreigner quietly, shaking her head in resignation. "My husband."

The other women smile at her in sympathy but say nothing. The photos — banned by Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban government with its rigid rules against photographs of living creatures, and against men and women mingling — vanish into the officer's purse.

The U.N. ban on all Ariana's international flights — a measure taken last month as part of an effort to pressure Afghanistan's Taliban regime to turn over alleged Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden for prosecution in the United States — has already taken a technical and emotional toll here.

Ordinary citizens, who already lacked international telephone service, now cannot receive air mail. With roads in Afghanistan damaged by years of shelling and bombing, and some highways blocked by fighting between the Taliban and resistance militias, flying is the only practical way to travel between major cities.

In theory, the U.N. ban permits flights to Saudi Arabia for religious pilgrimages to Mecca and Jeddah, but Ariana officials say they still haven't received approval to resume those trips, although the annual season for Muslims to travel for Umrah prayers is about to begin.

"There are 5 million Afghan refugees abroad. Our people are divided: mother here, son in Europe. This is only way to send letters, to know about family death or wedding," said one Ariana crew member who requested anonymity. "Now all doors are closed. It is not right what America and United Nations does to our people."

U.S. officials, who pressed for the U.N. flight ban, insist it's aimed only at punishing the regime. State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said last week that the sanctions, which also have frozen Taliban accounts abroad, were "carefully targeted" to avoid hurting ordinary citizens.

As the sanctions intended, however, the national airline is definitely suffering, with many of its 1,600 employees and dozens of planes grounded. Ariana maintenance used to be performed in the United Arab Emirates; now airline technicians say they must scavenge parts from planes stranded at domestic airports.

"This plane was built 30 years ago, but it still has life to fly, and we can find the parts we need," said a mechanic aboard the flight last week from Kabul to Herat. "Tires? We have enough for another three to four months," he added prying open the broken lavatory door with a screwdriver.

Although no catastrophes have occurred, flight crews and passengers know the planes aren't in perfect condition. There's a palpable sense of unease at takeoff and landing, and a feeling of suspense as people on the ground watch the landing gear retract and descend.

Like many Afghans, Ariana employees are ambivalent about whom to blame for the current state of affairs. Some protest that Western superpowers are toying cruelly with a poor Islamic country. Others hint at deep grievances against the Taliban.

Ariana pilots and crew members tend to be trim, graying veterans of the Afghan armed forces or careerists who recall Ariana's heyday as a successful regional airline before the country was torn apart by civil war. They take their responsibilities seriously and carry themselves with the seasoned, semi-military bearing of commercial pilots everywhere.—*Dawn/LAT-WP News Service (c) Washington Post.*

DAWN 09 DEC 1999

NATION 21 DEC 1999

Taliban, opposition swap POWs

BARIKAU FRONTLINES, Afghanistan (AFP) - Sitting cross-legged on a sunny hilltop, the Afghan Taliban commander surrounded by his armed soldiers was talking with his opposition counterpart on the radio.

Mawlawi Habibullah Reshad, chief of Interrogation for the Taliban Intelligence Department, was arranging to swap 14 prisoners with the opposition.

'Prisoner-swapping between us has been an ongoing process. In the past two months we have swapped 350 prisoners from both sides,' he said.

Around him the desert frontlines of Barikau, 45 kilometers (30 miles) north of the capital Kabul were quiet, as Taliban troops and opposition fighters loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood observe the Muslim holy month of Ramazan.

Talking on a wireless set attached to a home-made antenna fixed on the top of an underground bunker, Reshad asked the opposition commander if he could do him any more favours.

He was asked to find an opposition soldier who has been missing two years.

The Taliban, the Islamic militia who control most of Afghanistan, hold 4,500 opposition soldiers — 2,300 of whom are prisoners of war and the rest are political prisoners, he said.

These prisoners are kept in Kabul and in the southern province of Kandahar, home of the Taliban's headquarters, Reshad said.

For his part Masood holds 570 religious militia prisoners who are detained in his nearby stronghold of the Panjshir valley, 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Kabul and in his base in Taloqan, further north.

Reshad said the Taliban were ready for a general prisoner swap but claimed the opposition was opposed to the idea.

Masood wanted the militia to release all the prisoners belonging to his numerous allies which make up the anti-Taliban alliance, the Taliban official said.

But the Taliban were not convinced that Masood would free prisoners from rival opposition factions, he said.

He said Karim Khalili, leader of the rival Hezb-i-Wahdat party, shifted some Taliban prisoners to Iran last year after he was ejected from his base in central Afghanistan.

When prisoner swapping doesn't work, some men are simply bought from their captors.

'Recently we bought around 30 prisoners from the other side,' Reshad said.

In addition the Taliban released 450 prisoners from Kabul's main jail Pulicharkhi as a gesture before the start of Ramazan.

The Taliban authorities have allocated 9,000 afghanis (around 20 cents) for each prisoner's daily food, Reshad said, adding that families could bring food for their men in detention.

As he spoke, a military cargo plane flew overhead. In the rear lines the militia soldiers sunned themselves and serviced their old Russian battle tanks left by the Red Army after its 1979-1989 invasion of the Afghanistan.

Taliban execute foreign 'spies' tracking Osama

DUBAI (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia have executed a Jordanian and a citizen of a Gulf state for spying on Osama bin Laden, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

Al-Hayat daily quoted Arab travellers returning from Afghanistan as sources for the report.

Six days earlier the London-based Arabic newspaper had reported that Jordanian Abu Al-Moubtassim had been arrested by the Taliban on suspicion of spying on Osama for a foreign power.

The Jordanian's wife had admitted in a letter to the Taliban that her husband was working for an unnamed intelligence service and pleaded for his life to be spared, *Al-Hayat* said. Jordan announced last week that 13 Arab supporters of Osama had been arrested in the kingdom after returning from Afghanistan where they received weapons training. Washington said the arrests were linked to threats to bomb US targets.

NATION 23 DEC 1999

Future of many Afghan children uncertain

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Though, the new millennium is at the threshhold future of thousands of orphan Afghan children is uncertain.They are compelled to die by inches. The world bodies like UNICEF have done nothing to ameliorate the fate of these children.

A latest survey report has revealed that number of street children only in Kabul, capital of Afghanistan had reached 28,000 which could be considered highest in any part of the world. While number of Afghan children, engaged in child labour right from Hayatabad till the border check post of Torkham was estimated 25,000. Similarly, hundreds of Afghan children could be found on footpaths in all over the big cities and towns of the country, particularly at Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Apart from war-affected Afghanistan, Pakistan is hosting the second biggest population of Afghan street children. Besides the street children, the widows and orphan girls from Afghanistan could also be considered a serious issue.

The UN weekly update regarding Afghanistan reveals that 8,000 children are among the 16,000 people adjusted in the former Soviet Embassy compound. Almost all these children belong to various parts from north of Kabul. The report reveals that half of these children have never been to schools or any other institution.

Zarteef Khan Afridi, an activist of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has recently concluded a survey wherein he found some 25,000 Afghan children engaged in child labour between Hayatabad and Torkham. According to Afridi these children are earning livelihood sources by shifting of imported goods from the border areas to Hayatabad and other markets in Peshawar.

A joint survey, earlier conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Cooperative Centre for Afghanistan (CCA) reveals that 421,680 Afghan refugee children live in 48 different under specially difficult circumstances as orphans, street children, beggars, disabled, working children, victims of wars.

NATION
23 DEC 1999

8,000 children living in Kabul's ex-Soviet compound

KABUL (AFP) - Some 16,000 refugees, half of them children, are living in the bombed-out former Soviet embassy compound in Kabul, the United Nations said Tuesday.

The families were forced out of their villages in the Shamali plains, north of the capital, in the summer during an offensive by the ruling Taliban militia.

Of those living in the compound, some 5,500 children were older than six, but half had never been to school, according to a survey by the United Nations and aid group Care International.

The Taliban have allocated two compound buildings as schools for the children, the United Nations said in a weekly report.

Eleven teachers have been selected after passing a test on religious and modern subjects, it said.

Separate work by another western aid agency, Aschiana, said the number of street children in the capital has increased since the summer fighting, although it could not provide a figure.

Previous surveys have put the number of street children in Kabul at 28,000.

Afghanistan has been at war for 20 years since the former Soviet Union invaded on Christmas 1979.

The Taliban seized Kabul in September 1996 and now control most of the country.

Opposition fighters, led by Ahmad Shah Masood, hold the strategic Panjshir Valley north of Kabul and two provinces in the far northeast.

NATION
22 DEC 1999

Omer asks Afghans to offer prayers for rain

KABUL (AFP) - The head of Afghanistan's Taliban militia, Mulla Mohammad Omar, Thursday asked his people to walk into the deserts and offer prayers for rain, the official Radio Shariat said. 'The Amir-ul-Momenin invites the Muslim countrymen to go out to the deserts and offer Istisqa prayers for three days starting from Thursday,' the station quoted Omar as saying.

'They should beg God the Almighty to feel mercy for these suffering people and to send rain,' it said. For the second year running Afghanistan's winter is unusually dry, causing problems in a country relying on traditional irrigation systems from rivers to water crops.

In many parts of the country, farmers had only one harvest due to a lack of water last year.

NATION
24 DEC 1999

Afghans deportation from Gulf states starts

NATION 17 DEC 1998

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – In the wake of United Nations and United States sanctions against Afghanistan, deportation of Afghan citizens from various Arab countries has started. So far, more than 300 Afghan nationals, have been airlifted from Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Doha and other Gulf countries.

According to information collected by this correspondent from various sources, deportation of the Afghan nationals from various Arab countries was started in the beginning of current December. During this period, Political Agent Khyber Agency office at Peshawar has received five groups of the Afghan nationals from Special Branch Police Peshawar.

The deportation process of the Afghan nationals comprising, their airlifting through various flights from Dubai, Jeddah Saudi Arab, Doha Qatar and Kuwait. Majority of them are airlifted to Peshawar from where more than 22 international flights are being operated for various destinations in the Gulf region every week. After airlifting these Afghans at Peshawar, they are handed over to the Immigration Wing of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Later on the FIA handing over these people to the Special Branch police.

120,000 Afghan DPs back home

DAWN 17 DEC 1998

GENEVA, Dec 10: More than 120,000 Afghan refugees have returned home this year despite the turmoil in the central Asian nation, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office announced on Friday.

But Afghans still constitute the world's largest bloc of refugees, with around 2.6 million registered in neighbouring countries, and up to two million more eking out a living in Pakistan's main cities.

A total of 88,300 people returning from Pakistan had received help from the agency, UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond reported, while a further 35,000 were assisted by Afghan authorities in making the journey home from Iran.

"Despite the unstable situation in parts of Afghanistan, voluntary repatriation remains the most preferred solution by many Afghans and the governments of Iran and Pakistan," said Redmond.

"Given the situation in Afghanistan, UNHCR does not promote repatriation but rather facilitates the voluntary return of Afghans."

Two decades of strife, which have included Russian military occupation, civil war, and the seizure of power by the Talibaan Islamic fundamentalist force, have spawned a huge diaspora of Afghan refugees.

Some 1.2 million refugees are registered by the UNHCR as living in the Pakistan border provinces of North West Frontier and Baluchistan, and 1.4 million in Iran. Up to two million more are believed to be sheltering in Pakistan.—AFP

Pak-Iran initiatives for Afghan peace welcomed

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR – The Afghan nationals settled in Peshawar and other parts of the province, irrespective of their lingual, political and professional affiliations, have unanimously welcomed the recent understanding between Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Both the countries have established too much influence over its political and military sectors in the last 20 years. Now when the war flames of Afghanistan have become a serious threat to global peace, both the neighbouring countries need to concentrate maximum attention on resolving the Afghan conflict."

These views were expressed by a number of Afghans when approached by this correspondent for their reaction on recent announcement made by both Islamabad and Tehran on the eve of Chief Executive Gen. Pervez Musharaf visit to Iran.

Former Afghan minister and moderate leader Syed Ishaq Gillani when contacted told *The Nation*, " I believe that Afghan problem could be resolved whenever Pakistan and Iran agree on a formula." Elaborating his point of view, he said that both the countries have influence over of Afghanistan and without their sincere and honest support no one could resolve the conflict.

In the light of such realities, they believe that both Pakistan and Iran need to evolve a formula which could ensure a durable solution to the Afghan conflict which is not only beneficial for Afghanistan and its people but even could be in interests of the neighbouring countries.

In response to a question, Syed Ishaq Gillani who is founder of the Peshawar-based Council for Understanding and National Unity of Afghanistan, said ," we believe that giving away just right of self-determination to Afghans and an end to every sort of interferences in affairs of Afghanistan, is also must. And in this connection, the sincere support of both Pakistan and Iran could boost up efforts for getting such objectives. He added that it is need of the hour that both Pakistan and Iran should join hands for establishment of a friendly government.

Former Afghan Minister and Chief of Ghauri tribe from Central Afghanistan Abdul Qadar Imami welcomed understanding between the two neighbouring countries. He added that it was crystal clear that there were tense relations between the two countries.

In the light of such understanding, Imami said that Iran and Pakistan need to take early steps for isolation of all warring factions and finding out a negotiat solution to the conflict.

Shehzada Masud, a leader of the Great National United Front when approached for comments termed it a positive development. He added that now it is crystal clear that for the others Afghans suffered a lot and they couldn't afford more bloodshed and destruction in their motherland. Majority of the Afghans are now desirous for a negotiated solution. In this connection, he diverted attention towards outcome of the recent advisory council meeting at Rome, Italy wherein the representatives from all over Afghanistan had unanimously asked for an early solution to the conflict.

Prof. Yaqoob Zamani of the Afghan Center for Research said that they are happy over such an understanding between the two countries as without formation of a broad-based representative government no one could resolve the Afghan conflict. He said that unless building up a consensus among the Afghans as well as their neighbours, no one could resolve the conflict.

He added that both Pakistan and Iran are not only neighbouring countries of Afghanistan but they are linked up in close blood, religion and cultural relations with people of that country. Both the countries have extended tremendous support to Afghanistan and its people in the last 20 years and with their sincere understanding on formation of a broad-based representative government.

Afghan factions urged to stop fighting

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – The Afghan Women Council has asked the warring Afghan factions to stop fighting in the light of sacred month of Holy Ramazan.

Through its communique issued here on Friday, the Afghan Women Council added that after a period of around 20 days, the whole world would enter a new century with a hope of peace and progress. It added and remarked that responsibility rests with the warring factions who claim to have represented Afghans in this connection.

It added that it is crystal clear that none of the warring factions is either acceptable to Afghans or governing Afghanistan through any legitimate ways but they have empowered themselves through gun-point.

NATION 11 DEC 1999

Winter is bitter in sanction-hit Afghanistan

NATION 28 DEC 1999

JUST past dawn the sky is a bitter winter gray. Lines of ragged figures huddle in a field of frozen mud, waiting for a jeep bringing bread. Children are coughing and weeping from the cold but their presence is essential because each family member gets one loaf.

Policemen in black turbans tower over the crowd, shouting at people to keep order. Women covered with blue veils cower and plead as the policemen flail at the crowd with doubled ropes, bullying stragglers into line.

Finally, the jeep pulls up. Men missing legs hobble forward on crutches. Women push their children ahead. Hands reach up to clutch the precious brown loaves and hug them for warmth. Then the families hurry home to what may be their only meal of the day.

This is what it has come to for tens of thousands of people in Kabul, as the capital faces its fourth winter under the Islamic Taliban regime and its first under international economic sanctions - a struggle against hunger, cold and sickness that has reduced daily life to a primitive routine of begging, scavenging, bargaining for a few sticks of firewood and waiting in line for bread.

No one appears to be starving, but more than 250,000 people rely on free or subsidized bread programmes operated by international relief agencies. The UN World Food programme operates 37 low-cost bakeries, and the International Committee of the Red Cross gives away carloads of protein-rich bread at half a dozen locations.

"We're not seeing malnutrition like Africa, but people have to be very skilled at developing survival strategies," said Marcus Dolder, who directs the Red Cross programme.

"A monthly salary here is worth less than a pack of Marlboros, and nobody can live on that," he said. "So people go deep into debt, they sell their ration cards, they bribe their way onto distribution lists. They are smarter than we are, and I can't blame them."

Afghanistan's economy is at a standstill after two decades of war, first against Soviet troops and then among ... into beating back pockets of military resistance in the northern part of the country, with little left over to rebuild hospitals, roads, power plants or factories.

At the same time, the world has shunned the Taliban as an illegitimate, fundamentalist regime that has imposed a radical brand of Islamic law, denying women access to education, employment and medical care. The United States has banned trade and investment because of terrorist attacks against two of its African embassies allegedly masterminded by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi fugitive who has been living in asylum here.

Last month the United Nations followed suit with a ban on international flights to Afghanistan. Angry Afghan mobs responded by attacking UN installations in six cities. The economic sanctions exempt food and medical relief, however, and aid officials say their work has not been hindered.

No reliable economic statistics have been available about Afghanistan for years, but in 1991, according to UN estimates, the gross national product per person was $155, one of the lowest in the world. The country is a major producer of opium, which brought in an estimated $183 million last year, but Afghanistan has few valuable legal exports and little to show for its drug income.

The United Nations, which issued an appeal for $221 million in aid to Afghanistan last month, calculates that the country's illiteracy rate is as high as 70 percent. Only 35 percent of the population has access to health care and the combined annual death rate for infants and small children exceeds 200 per 1,000.

Now the sting of winter has added a cruel new dimension to the hardships of Kabul, a city of ruins and refugees where beggars and scavengers already outnumber the formally employed. Electricity is erratic and most buildings have no heat.

At night, temperatures fall well below freezing. Families who can afford to buy a few pounds of coal huddle around braziers called sandalis or build wood fires on mud floors. Those who cannot afford fuel share blankets. Colds and lung ailments are rampant; Afghan health officials said they have already seen thousands of cases of tuberculosis this season.

In some parts of the country, especially in the rural northeast where fighting continues to rage, Afghan officials and international aid workers said conditions were even worse. The United Nations has successfully negotiate,d with the Taliban to carry relief supplies across the northern front lines, but the effort has been hindered by heavy snow and impassable roads.

"I feel such pity for people," said Abbas Stanikzai, deputy minister of public health. "We are doing what we can but we can still only provide half the health care a normal human being needs. Our country has been destroyed and we have been isolated by the world. If everyone keeps condemning us instead of helping us, how can we begin to rebuild?"

Not everyone in Kabul is living hand-to-mouth, however. There is still a small middle class of teachers, doctors and bureaucrats who remained behind after most of their peers fled. But many live in dank, unheated Soviet-era apartments and most earn the equivalent of less than $5 a month.

At the other end of the narrow economic spectrum are the victims of unending civil war: thousands of refugees who have fled from fighting in the north, and thousands of war widows and orphans who ask for money in bazaars hunt for twigs for fuel or peddle their services as itinerant bootblacks or incense swingers.

Ziamuddin, 12, whose father was killed three years ago, spends five hours a day knocking on doors with his incense burner, hoping someone will pay him a few cents for a ritual blessing. His six younger brothers and sisters spend all day begging.

At night, their pooled income amounts to about 50 cents. None of the seven has ever attended school, although Ziamuddin recently enrolled in a training programme for street children.

"I have to do this," he said. "There is no money and we have to buy bread." The bazaars of Kabul are a striking contrast in want and plenty. Street carts are piled high with carrots and cauliflower, unsold because people cannot afford the prices, while tins of Indian tea and jars of English jam grow dusty on grocery shelves.

Begging women and children crowd every corner and most shoppers ...



Rabbani wants Dostum to fight Taliban

KABUL, Dec 22: Ousted Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani has asked former communist general Abdul Rashid Dostam to return to Afghanistan and fight against the Taliban, a spokesman said on Wednesday.

Rabbani held meetings with Dostam and Hezb-i-Wahdat leader Karim Khalili in Iran during a four-day visit, said spokesman, Abdullah.

He told Dostam he should come back to resume fight, Abdullah said, speaking by satellite phone from Mashad.

"Rabbani discussed the Afghan military situation with General Dostam and told him that there was no obstacle to his return," the spokesman said.

Dostam, who was ejected last year from his base in Mazar-i-Sharif, now under Taliban control, wants to return home and regroup his scattered ethnic Uzbek militia forces, Abdullah said.

According to the spokesman, Rabbani's official talks with Iranian authorities have ended, but he is still in Iran. The talks focussed on the military and political situation in Afghanistan.

Rabbani was ousted from Kabul, together with his military strongman Ahmad Shah Masood, in 1996 by the Taliban.

The Taliban's Shariat Weekly said on Wednesday Rabbani visited Tehran to make a new alliance with Dostam and his rival ethnic Uzbek General Abdul Malik, who came from Turkey and the United States respectively. But another opposition source denied the presence of Malik in Iran.—AFP

DAWN 23 DEC [illegible]

Rabbani for early solution of Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (NNI) – The deposed Afghan President, Professor Rabbani has said he wants to hold talks with the new leadership in Pakistan to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

"We do not believe in military solution rather believe in amicable settlement of the issue. We welcome peace talks. We held several rounds of talks with Taliban but they have always avoided negotiations", Rabbani told Radio Tehran.

He said that he visited Islamabad and offered talks to the former Pakistani prime minister and asked him to invite the Taliban leaders to Islamabad for talks. Talks were also held in Ashqabad.

"I also held talks with the Pakistani officials prior to the change of government there. We also exchanged delegations. Now too, my demand is that we should hold parleys with Pakistani authorities, the new leadership. Similarly, we have always asked Taliban to come forward and hold talks instead of waging war. We would welcome any meeting in this connection", Rabbani said.

He urged the Iranian President Muhammad Khatami that being a Chairman of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Tehran should launch new initiative, make fresh efforts and evolve a new programme. "This is my request to the UN and the OIC to evolve an effective mechanism for restoration of peace in Afghanistan", said Rabbani.

He said that during his latest visit to Iran, he held detailed talks with the former President and Chairman Expediency Council, Hashmi Rafsanjani on different issues.

He said that difficulties have emerged all over Afghanistan due to fighting and Taliban have regrettably adopted militaristic policies. They launched fierce attacks in north of Kabul and Kapisa as well as in northern Afghanistan, causing lots of destruction. The conditions in the north, both social and economic, are very pathetic due to the excesses of Taliban. Prices have gone high.

However, these miseries are less as compared to those faced by the people in Taliban-held areas. Anyhow the situation is bad all over Afghanistan and there is dearth of commodities, Rabbani observed. He said that the United Nations is certainly providing some aid but this has so far not been able to meet the requirements of the Afghan people. "The most we need is peace in our country.

We hope that the world would continue to help the Afghan people even after ending of fighting", he said.

Rabbani added that Taliban and their supporters might have realised that war is no solution. The people in Afghanistan had come fed up with the war. He expressed the hope that peace would be restored in Afghanistan. Professor Rabbani said that a new leadership has emerged in Pakistan and leader of this government, General Pervez Musharraf has said that he wanted a broad-based government in Afghanistan. He said that the world has also convinced that international problems would be created if human rights violations and narcotics production was not stopped in Afghanistan. He said the remarked passed by General Pervez. Musharraf has given birth to some confidence. About the Rome meeting, he said that he welcomed any peace efforts in and outside the country provided they do not end up in personal interests and do not create further problems.

NATION 22 DEC [illegible]

Afghan peace only thru negotiations

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Moderate Afghan leader and chief of National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani has started consultation with his party's stalwarts and leading tribal chieftains and intellectuals for peace in Afghanisatn.

Soon after his return from abroad a few days ago, Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani convened a meeting of the party stalwarts from all over the region. Besides others former diplomats, technocrats, a large number of tribal chieftains from various parts of Afghanistan also attended the meeting and they unanimously resolved for finding out an early solution to the long-awaited Afghan conflict which is possible only through convening a meeting of the traditional loya jirga.

A NIFA spokesman informed that, Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani briefed the party stalwarts about proceedings of the Rome, Italy Conference held at the end of previous November. In this connection, he diverted attention towards the unanimity among the participants in favour of the proposed Loya Jirga meeting. He added that now it is crystal clear that no one could resolve the Afghan conflict through military ways.

Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani informed the participants about the steps, finalised by the Rome Conference for ensuring an early meeting of the Loya Jirga. These steps include sending of the delegations to the United Nations, neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian Republics, United States of America, European Union. Organisation of the Islamic Countries and others to seek their cooperation in materialising the long-awaited dream of the war-affected Afghans who are fed-up with the useless and meaningless fighting in their motherland.

The NIFA chief also exchanged views with his party stalwarts regarding the second proposal for holding contacts with the warring Afghan factions. Purposes of such a contact is to convince both the sides for halting every sort of fighting against each others as well as to support the negotiation process for finding out a permanent solution to the conflict.

Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani asked the participants to come forward with proposals for initiating contacts with Taliban as well as the Northern Alliance. It was suggested that NIFA leaders would send delegations to various parts of Afghanistan for holding negotiations with the leaders of the warring factions.Speaking on the occasion, Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani has expressed satisfaction over the Rome, Italy Conference and stated it a positive step towards resolving the dispute. He asked the party stalwarts to speed up their efforts for implementation of the declaration, adopted by the Organising Committee of the emergency Loya Jirga held at Rome, Italy. He was of the view that with the implementation of the former kings proposals, Afghanistan could get its lost identity.

Advocating further in favour of the peace process, Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani said that it is crystal clear that ongoing war flames in Afghanistan are not only harmful to the future of that country and its people but even it enhancing problems for the neighbouring countries. He urged Pakistan, Iran and other neighbouring countries to extend help to former king Mohammad Zahir Shah for implementation of his proposals which could ensure return of peace and tranquility in Afghanistan.

NATION

23 DEC 1999

Rabbani arrives in Iran

TEHRAN, Dec 19: Ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani is in Tehran for talks with Iranian leaders on the ongoing civil war in his country, the official news agency IRNA reported on Sunday.

Rabbani said he wanted to speak with his counterparts about "the latest developments in the situation in Afghanistan and examine solutions to the crisis" in the country, IRNA reported.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mohsen Amizadeh, who welcomed Rabbani at Tehran airport on his arrival on Saturday, called for a "swift resolution" to the crisis in Afghanistan.

During his three-day visit, Rabbani is due to meet Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and several other government officials, IRNA said.

The visit comes several days after a visit here by Pakistan's chief executive Gen Pervez Musharraf.

After Gen Musharraf's visit, Iran and Pakistan decided to coordinate their policies in Afghanistan to encourage reconciliation and dialogue in the country.

"We agreed to coordinate the policies of our two countries for encouraging the peace process through reconciliation and dialogue among the Afghan parties," Gen Musharraf said before his departure from Tehran.—AFP

DAWN

20 DEC 1999

Annan calls for resolving Afghan conflict

By Masood Haider

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 30: Warning that the Afghan conflict could spin out of control and adversely impact peace and security in the region, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called upon the international community to pay full attention to the root cause of the civil war and foreign interference in the country.

In his latest report to the Security Council on the Afghan situation released on Monday, Annan paints a grim picture of the conflict which "is increasingly having a negative impact beyond the borders of that country."

He criticized Afghanistan's neighbours for getting involved militarily in the conflict, which has "every indication" of spreading.

"Such interference from outside the country remains one of the biggest impediments to peace as it provides essential means for the continued fighting in the forms of arms, ammunition and other war-making material," he said.

He cited the religious schools in Pakistan as the source for new Taliban fighters — some as young as 14.

On the political front, the report cites "the lack of progress" in efforts to achieve a peaceful solution. At the same time, the people of Afghanistan have continued to suffer a "massive" loss of their human rights throughout the year, Annan says.

The devastating impact of war on all aspects of Afghan society is compounded by a combination of poverty, profound under-development, absence of accountable governance mechanism and a pattern of systematic violation of humanitarian law.

The secretary-general also warned that Afghanistan had become the world's largest illicit opium producer in 1999 — a situation, which, he said, was unlikely to change unless peace was established.

He pointed to increasing evidence that the Taliban were becoming a "breeding ground for religious extremism and sectarian violence as well as various types of international terrorism" as reason for serious concern.

The Security Council this month imposed sanctions on the Taliban for having failed to hand over Osama bin Laden for his trial in the bombing of two US embassies in Africa.

Annan told the Security Council that after a careful review of recent developments, he and his special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, had reached the conclusion that Brahimi's activities should be "frozen" until circumstances changed to justify his renewed diplomatic efforts.

At the same time the primary role in conducting UN peacemaking activities in the country would be assumed by the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), Annan said.

Based in Islamabad, the UNSMA will progressively move office to Kabul where the closer proximity will afford it more frequent contacts with both the belligerents and non-belligerents.

The secretary-general also intends to open a sub-office in Tehran in early 2000 to increase regular contacts with neighbouring states as well as Afghan factions and individuals.

In his analysis, Annan notes that the Afghan factions and relevant regional powers have yet to demonstrate sufficient political will to find a common approach to the Afghan question.

Referring to the work of the "Six plus Two" group, Annan observed that its members could do a great deal more to end military support for the Afghan factions. The limited impact of the group, which is composed of Afghanistan's six neighbouring countries, Russia and the US, "has led some to express doubts about the usefulness of its very existence," he underscored. Annan, however, said that he will continue to work with its members and seek ways of improving its creativity and effectiveness.

DAWN
10 DEC 1999

UN aid to Afghanistan by weekend

KABUL, Dec 1: The UN said on Wednesday it expected to send emergency aid supplies for tens of thousands of displaced Afghans who sought refuge in the opposition-held Panjsher valley north of Kabul by the weekend.

Erick de Mul told a news conference on Wednesday that mines and unexploded ordnance would be removed by Thursday from the land route chosen to take the supplies through the frontlines between the ruling Taliban and opposition forces.

"Hopefully by the weekend or at latest next week we would have the convoy on road," he said.

UN officials met representatives of the Taliban and the opposition in the area on Tuesday to chalk out a plan for the relief operation, de Mul said, calling it an "extremely positive encounter".

The UN plans to shift several thousand tons of food, shelter and heating materials for an estimated 65,000 people displaced by fighting in the summer and now living in public buildings and mosques in Panjsher, the main stronghold of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

The people fled their homes in the Shomali plains north of Kabul at the end of July when the Taliban launched a big offensive to wrest control of the approximately 10 percent of Afghanistan remaining under opposition control.

On Nov 20, the Taliban allowed the UN to send aid to Panjsher. In return, the Taliban wants the UN to provide aid for more than 40,000 displaced people from Shomali now living in Kabul.

CHILD SOLDIERS: A senior UN official, challenged by the Taliban to find child warriors in its ranks, said he found no children fighting for the Islamic militia in a brief visit to a frontline near Kabul.

"What I have seen today gives me the impression that this is not the case. People of seasoned age, middle age and youngsters are there, but not at the age of 14 or 15," Erick de Mul, the UN aid coordinator for Afghanistan, told a news conference.

His statement was at odds with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who issued a report on Afghanistan this week in which he said children under the age of 14 were fighting alongside the Taliban against opposition fighters.—Reuters

DAWN 02 DEC 1999

UN freezes Brahimi's peace efforts in Afghanistan

By Hasan Akhtar

ISLAMABAD, Nov 30: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has announced that peace efforts in Afghanistan by his special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi were being indefinitely "frozen" because of lack of any meaningful progress to end the 10-year old intra-Afghan civil war.

The UN secretary general in his annual report to the Security Council has stated: "Following a careful review of recent developments, my special envoy and I have reached the conclusion that given the lack of progress achieved so far, his activities should be "frozen" until such time as circumstances change to justify his renewed intervention". Brahimi had been on his mission for more than two years.

Special envoy Brahimi who made his last bid for peace in summer this year decided to end his endeavours when rival factions failed to hammer out a peace formula.

The political initiative would be maintained by the United Nations, according to the UN secretary general. It was being restored as before, to the permanent UN Special Mission for Afghanistan, (UNSMA) headquartered in Islamabad for the last about a decade and a half. The secretary general's report indicated that the UNSMA's secondary office might be revived in Kabul as soon as reasonable security and other facilities were guaranteed and a sub-office would also be established in Iran.

The UNSMA Civil Affairs Unit is also being set inside Afghanistan with the primary objective of promoting human rights efforts and preventing the on-going systematic violations of human rights, specially affecting women and children. "The human and social outlook for Afghanistan remains grim" the secretary general report observed and warned "the next year will be particularly difficult".

DAWN 01 DEC 1999

UNOCHA starts daily flights to Kandahar

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD – The United Nations Office of Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) has started airlifting relief cargo for the passengers of the hijacked Indian Airline plane stationed at the Kandahar airport. The first UNOCHA flight carried 200 lunch boxes, toiletaries, quilts/blankets and other items on Thursday morning.

It is learnt that there is a demand for enhanced supplies and on Friday morning 700 lunch boxes along with other essential items will be sent to Kandahar to meet the growing demands. UNOCHA has decided to put both of its aircrafts, UN-1 and UN-2, in the relief operations and both the aircrafts will have daily flights to Kandahar for transportation of relief supplies.

Meanwhile, the diplomats of five countries who have also reached Kandahar from Islamabad to be part of the negotiations for the release of the passengers among whom people from their countries are also present, have also approached UNOCHA for the supply of essential commodities for them in Kandahar.

NATION 31 DEC 1999

Production of raw opium on rise in Afghanistan

UN sanctions likely to encourage poppy cultivation

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR – The recent United Nations and United States sanctions against Afghanistan are likely to cause a sharp increase in opium production in all over the war-torn Afghanistan which may be a serious blow to the efforts of United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). So far all the UNDCP volunteers and personnel of other non-government organisations (NGO's) are busy in collecting details of the poppy crop cultivation in the war-torn Afghanistan.

Surprisingly, despite reduction of poppy crop cultivation by 50 per cent in some of the Southern provinces, especially in Qandahar, Taliban leaders in response to the UN-USA sanctions have asked the farmers from Eastern provinces to bring more land under poppy crop cultivation this year.

So far, outcome of such an un-announced declaration is yet to be ascertained but it is learnt that neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran was concerned over it and the latest reports reveal that it had ordered closure of Eastern borders with Afghanistan. While reaction of Pakistan against such a decision of Taliban is still awaited. However, it could enhance uncertainty for the global community which is united against drugs.

Recently, a UN report has confirmed that the production of raw opium in Afghanistan has reached the highest level. The production of an estimated 4,600 metric tons of raw opium marks nearly 120 per cent increase over production registered in Afghanistan in 1998. They are under poppy cultivation, according to the report, was 64,000 hectares in 1998 was increased to 91,000 in 1999. It further declared that upto 97 per cent opium is being produced in Taliban controlled areas in all over Afghanistan.

Taking a serious notice of the increasing opium production in Afghanistan, the UNDCP authorities had entered into an agreement with Taliban in early 1999. In the light of such an agreement, the UNDCP had allocated a fund of one million United States dollars for encouraging alternate and cash crop cultivation in several eastern provinces of the border Nangarhar province. Similarly, in response of million of dollars other cash funds, the Taliban leaders have also agreed for reducing poppy crop cultivation by 50 per cent in some of the southern provinces of Afghanistan. It may be recalled that soon after signing such agreements, the Taliban leadership have claimed demolishing of some 34 heroin manufacturing laboratories in Achin and Shinwar districts of Nangarhar province.

Now when the UN imposed sanctions against Afghanistan, the preliminary reports from poppy growing regions of that country reveal sharp increase in its cultivation. Except Qandahar, Taliban have given away a free hand to the agriculturists from other provinces like Helmand, Zabul, Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman, Nimroz, Paktya, Paktika, Nimroz, Farah, Oruzgan, Ghazni and others to bring more and more land under poppy cultivation.

It may be interesting to note that majority of the farmers who are involved in opium production inside Afghanistan are residing in Peshawar and other parts of regions of NWFP and tribal areas. They regularly cross the border for routine activities in the poppy crop fields. However, during harvesting time, almost members of the family remain on the sites for completion of the process. A farmer from Ghanikhel area of Nangarhar when approached confirmed that he had made double the land under poppy crop cultivation. In response to a question, he said that last year, Taliban have not only imposed a ban on cultivation of poppy seeds on government land but even they have forced the farmers to show decrease in its cultivation. But this time there is no instructions or directives from Taliban which are likely to cause further increase in the poppy crop cultivation as well as in opium production.

NATION 03 DEC 1999

'Curbs on Afghanistan not to deliver'

ISLAMABAD (APP) – Chief Coordinator of UN aid for Afghanistan, Julian Lerly has said that the sanctions would not help achieve what the UN and the world wanted, VOA reports.

According to VOA, he said, the UN and the world should determine what they wanted from the Afghans? Do they want to make them beggars? he asked.

Afghans are very self-respectful and brave people he said adding but they should be assured that they would not be left alone.

Quoting UN Coordinator on Afghanistan, Erick De Mul the report says that Afghans are very tough people. They are very credible people.

They can extract oil even from a stone. They are very hard working and self-contented. One should appreciate them.

Describing the ability of Afghan people to adjust themselves according to situation, the report says, there is a tailoring shop of two brothers. Their sewing machine is working on energy produced by a bicycle. The younger brother is running the bicycle which on its turn operates the sewing machine, while the elder brother is operating the machine itself.

The Afghans have borne many hardships and it seems that it was not sufficient as the UN impose economic sanctions on them. The UN did so to pressurize Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden to them. Though humanitarian aid supplies are exempted from these sanctions yet the Afghans feel they may affect every thing and are likely to further agonize the lives of the poor people in the ensuing winter season.

Demonstration have been held against the UN but Taliban asked them not to do so. Taliban have also asked the people not to depend upon the UN and to suffice on whatever they possess, the report concluded.

NATION 01 DEC 1999

UN deal on aid convoys with Taliban, opposition

KABUL, Dec 3: A UN aid convoy will leave here on Saturday to feed refugees sheltering in the Panjshir Valley after a deal was agreed with the Taliban and opposition commanders, the UN said.

The United Nations won agreement from the two warring sides to open a humanitarian corridor from Kabul north across the frontlines on the Shamali plains into the opposition-held valley, officials said on Friday.

With the corridor, the UN will be able to deliver food and basic goods to the tens of thousands of refugees who fled to the Panjshir, in the Hindu Kush mountain range, in the summer to escape fighting.

The Taliban agreed to the corridor in principle last month and then agreed a final deal with the opposition in a rare meeting on Thursday, the UN officials said.

UN teams are now de-mining the route and the first convoy should be free to leave on Saturday.

Some 60,000 refugees are sheltering in the valley, of whom 25,000 have no shelter despite the onset of Afghanistan's bitter winter, according to UN figures.

The UN and other aid groups have been bringing aid to the valley from Tajikistan and northeastern Afghanistan. But heavy snow and rainfalls on passes in the mountains have made the roads increasingly tough to negotiate.

The opposition forces, led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood, hold only two provinces in the northeast, Takhar and Badakshan, and the northern part of Shamali plains.

CHILD SOLDIERS: Opposition commanders have said UN coordinator Erick de Mul was being manipulated by the Taliban in a row over child soldiers.

De Mul came to Afghanistan for "a humanitarian mission to help refugees in the Panjshir Valley," Abdullah (one name), a spokesman for Ahmad Shah Masood, told AFP.

Some 60,000 refugees have sought shelter in the Panjshir, north of Kabul, after heavy fighting earlier this year, according to UN figures.

De Mul had been "manipulated by the Taliban," when he went to inspect the frontlines on the Shamali plains to check whether the ruling Islamic militia were using child soldiers, Abdullah said late Thursday.

The UN official was taken to the frontlines on the Shamali plains, north of Kabul, after the Taliban vigorously denied a UN report which criticized the ruling militia for using fighters as young as 14.

De Mul said after his visit that what he had seen "did not give the impression" the Taliban were using child soldiers.

But the opposition's Abdullah said the Taliban had "pulled out all their young fighters" before the inspection.

In the past, he said, opposition fighters had captured very young soldiers whose names had been given to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Those young fighters had been released, he said.—AFP

DAWN 04 DEC 1999

DAWN 05 DEC 1999

UN aid convoy hits snag with Taliban

KABUL (AFP) - A UN aid convoy due to leave here Saturday to feed refugees sheltering in the Panjshir Valley has been prevented from departing amid ongoing talks with the ruling Taliban, humanitarian sources said.

The hitch came after the United Nations won agreementfrom the Taliban and warring opposition forces to open a humanitarian corridor from Kabul north across the frontlines on the Shamali plains into the opposition-held valley, officials said Friday.

With the corridor the United Nations will be able to deliver food and basic goods to the tens of thousands of refugees who fled to the Panjshir, in the Hindu Kush mountain range, in the summer to escape fighting.

But plans for the corridor have hit a snag for undisclosed reasons, humanitarian sources said.

The Taliban agreed to the corridor in principle last month and then agreed a final deal with the opposition in a rare meeting on Thursday, the UN officials said.

UN teams are now demining the route and the first convoy should be free to leave on Saturday.

Some 60,000 refugees are sheltering in the valley, of whom 25,000 have no shelter despite the onset of Afghanistan's bitter winter, according to UN figures.

The United Nations and other aid groups have been bringing aid to the valley from Tajikistan and northeastern Afghanistan. But heavy snow and rainfalls on passes in the mountains have made the roads increasingly tough to negotiate.

The opposition forces, led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood, hold only two provinces in the northeast, Takhar and Badakshan, and the northern part of Shamali plains.

UN food convoy leaves Kabul for Gulbahar

KABUL (APP/AP)–After negotiating safe passage with the ruling Taliban and clearing landmines, the United Nations on Monday moved 90 tons of food to cold and hungry refugees in enemy territory, officials said.

The U.N. convoy of eight trucks left the Afghan capital loaded with wheat and warm clothes for refugees of last summer's bitter fighting on the Shomali Plains north of Kabul, said U.N. spokesman Raz Mohammed.

An estimated 60,000 refugees are living in territory controlled by the northern-based opposition, led by ousted Defense Minister Ahmed Shah Massood. The distribution of emergency aid is to be done in Jebul Siraj and Gulbahar, in the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains, some 60 kilometers (36 miles) north of Kabul, said Mohammed. "We want to encourage the refugees to come to Gulbahar where there are buildings where we can distribute the food," he said.

Gulbahar is barely 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Panjshir Valley, where Massood is in full control and where thousands of people are living in the open in frigid sub-zero conditions.

Erick de Mul, the U.N. coordinator for Afghanistan, negotiated safe passage from the Taliban who have agreed to let the convoy of trucks pass through the front lines on the new road outside Kabul toward Baghram airforce base to reach refugees.

The Taliban also have requested the U.N. provide emergency aid to another 40,000 refugees who are living in Kabul, many of them in the abandoned Russian embassy compound on the outskirts of the city.

Many of those refugees are women and children and elderly men.

The Taliban were soundly criticized by the United Nations which accused the religious militia of targetting civilians during their battle on the Shomali Plains saying they burned homes, destroyed irrigation canals and forcibly relocated people. The Taliban denied their charges.

One major problem of the food distribution has been landmines. The United Nations has deployed its mine cleaners to the front line to make sure it is safe for the convoy, said Mohammed.

NATION 07 DEC 1999

UN deal on aid convoys with Taliban, opposition

KABUL (AFP) - A UN aid convoy will leave the Afghan capital Kabul on Saturday to feed refugees sheltering in the Panjshir Valley after a deal was agreed with the ruling Taliban militia and opposition commanders, the UN said.

The United Nations won agreement from the two warring sides to open a humanitarian corridor from Kabul north across the frontlines on the Shamali plains into the opposition-held valley, officials said Friday.

With the corridor the UN will be able to deliver food and basic goods to the tens of thousands of refugees who fled to the Panjshir, in the Hindu Kush mountain range, in the summer to escape fighting.

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The opposition forces, led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood, hold only two provinces in the northeast, Takhar and Badakshan, and the northern part of Shamali plains.

First UN convoy crosses Afghan frontlines

GULBAHAR (Afghanistan), Dec 6: A UN convoy carrying food and clothes crossed Afghanistan's frontlines for the first time Monday after a rare agreement between the two warring sides, an AFP reporter saw.

Eight 15-tonne trucks from the UN World Food Programme left the capital Kabul early in the day, crossed the frontlines 40 kilometres (25 miles) further north and delivered the aid to a warehouse here.

The 90 tonnes of wheat, 11,000 sweaters and 100 jackets will be stored in the building, an old German-run textile factory, and then taken north into the Panjshir Valley, where tens of thousands of refugees are sheltering.

"This is an important step forward," said Jacques Collignon, logistics coordinator at the UN World Food Programme. "It was a good day."

The convoy marks a key step forward in United Nations negotiations between the ruling Taliban militia, who control Kabul and most of the country, and the opposition fighters, whose main base is in the Panjshir.

Some 60,000 people are still sheltering in the valley, where they fled after heavy fighting in the summer across the Shamali plains, which separate Kabul from the Panjshir.

Although some have managed to return home either to stay or to collect clothes and the few possessions they have, many tens of thousands have nothing and no homes left.

Aid agencies and the United Nations have been able to supply aid to the Panjshir from the north, but as Afghanistan's bitter winter begins to set in those routes, through high mountain passes, have become virtually impassable.

For the next three days larger convoys, with 20 trucks each, will make the two-hour journey every day from Kabul to Gulbahar, delivering around 750 tonnes of wheat in total. UN officials have been mediating between the two warring sides for several weeks trying to prepare the groundwork to allow the convoy to pass.

It took two days alone to demine the road linking the two sides' forward positions across no man's land.—AFP

Over $12m UN aid for displaced Afghans

From Marjan Ali Shah

PESHAWAR – The United Nations has expedited its assistance activities for the displaced Afghans and the planned to distribute US $ 12.5 millions aid upto May 2000, in various parts of the war-torn country.

According to the UN weekly update, besides the UN agencies, donors and NGOs, the governments of Germany, Netherlands and Turkey have also contributed to funds for the displaced Afghans.

In the capital Kabul, some 16000 IDPs(Internally Displaced Persons) of which 10,000 are children, are housed in the ex-Soviet compound. The UN and NGOs conducted distribution of non food items, WFP distributed corn and soya blend, the local authorities bread, another NGO CARE has almost completed winterisation and water and sanitation works, Save the Children Funds provided heating in the compound.

Over 20,000 families have been registered in Kabul between August and October but due to shifting of IDP to the relative house, rented rooms or squatted in empty homes in the city, it is very difficult to collect the accurate figure. Cash for work and food for work programs are being finalised to assist this population.

The infighting in Kunduz and Takhar in October and November caused further displacement of civilians but now after temporary pause in the infighting most of the families were returning to their native villages. The ICRC, WFP and two other NGOs are currently involved in supporting the IDPs in the areas through distribution of food and non food items while one NGO is planning to assist the local population in repairing the damaged shelters.

The UN has coordinated with an NGO in distributing essential non food and food items to 1000 most vulnerable families in Darra Souf district Samangan province where from 5000 to 7000 families have been displaced in one year while in Bamyan valley the first round of food distribution has been completed but some IDPs have not yet return and stayed in the neighboring districts such as Panjao and Yakaolong. Large scale of cash for work activities continue to provide employment and assist rehabilitation. ECHO supported some projects in these areas but according to some reports some may be ill prepared for the winter.

In the Panjsher valley, where totals IDPs are 65000, about 50,000 people are in need of food and 30,000 of shelter but due to cold weather and infighting a few hundred IDP families have recently left the area. Work to rehabilitate and winterise public buildings in the Panjsher is almost completed. Non food items have been distributed to the most vulnerable IDPs and about 1200 houses have been repaired and 330 new shelters were built by ACTED NGO while 2500 metric tons of wheat have been distributed to 8500 families. Due to winter, access to the valley is a major concern. To resolve this issue, the UN has established a joint commission of Taliban and Nothern Alliance for crossing the front lines from Kabul and the first convoy, carried 90 MT of wheat flour, 1000 coats and 10,000 sweaters successfully made the trip to the area on December 6. Delivery of 750 tons of wheat and non food items is planned to send soon.

WHO with the help of MoPH, UNICEF and UN agencies and health NGOs have vaccinated children against Polio in the second round of National Immunisation Days (NID) in all except five districts including 100 percent coverage in some districts. During the campaign the provinces of Baghlan and Kunduz and some districts near the front line were also covered. NIDs activities were implemented in all districts in Southern Afghanistan and all Nothern provinces including Balkhab district of Saripul province and Darra Souf. In the North east, the campaign in Baharak jurm and Wardoj has been postponed for security reasons. All under four years children received the vaccine whether they have been immunised previously or not and even they were sick.

WHO with the Ministry of Public Health has completed two months course for female doctors and health workers including 23 graduates of the course were female medical doctors, nurses and midwives from seven provinces in the nothern and western region of Afghanistan. The course focused on sage motherhood practice, child health, prevention of infectious diseases, primary health care and preventive medicines.

NATION 10 DEC 1999

DAWN 11 DEC 1999

WFP warns of wheat shortage in Afghanistan

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Dec 10: The World Food Programme on Friday warned that millions of poor Afghans in urban and rural areas might not be able to get enough food to feed their families if the price of wheat does not decrease significantly.

The WFP officials here expressed extreme concern about the increase in cost of wheat in Afghanistan and said that only an increase in food supplies from neighbouring countries will reduce wheat prices and prevent a major threat to vulnerable Afghans.

The present wheat situation, they said, follows a bad harvest, the reduction of wheat trade across the Afghan borders, and speculation in Afghan markets.

According to a UN press release, prices have increased since the beginning of October and reached their highest level in the second week of December. The aid community will not be able to meet the entire food needs of millions of Afghan people, WFP emphasised and said that Pakistan is the major wheat supplier to Afghanistan.

Twenty to 40 per cent of households in Kandahar, Kabul, Ghazni, and various food insecure rural ares have already been affected by the increase in prices. In Kabul and Kandahar, where imports make up at least 40 per cent of the cereal supply, wheat flour prices have gone up by over 80 per cent in the past ten weeks. In Ghazni, prices have increased by over 100 per cent.

In November, the Iranian authorities agreed to reopen the border with Afghanistan. WFP Herat reported that seven trucks a day (with a capacity of 40 tons) are entering Afghanistan from the Torghundi border (Turkmenistan) and seven trucks a day (with a capacity of 10 tons) are daily entering from Islam-Qala border (Iran).

While prices in some Afghan cities initially fell at the news of the opening of the Iranian border, these began to shoot up again one week after announcement due to limited inflows of wheat.

The release said that the WFP is currently considering how to respond to the situation in Kandahar city and surroundin food insecure rural areas.

Currently home to the largest number of food insecure people of any Afghan city, Kabul is another area of concern. There, the WFP is assisting 2,66,000 vulnerable people through the bakery projects and 13,000 newly arrived IDPs in the former Russian compound. These programmes should minimise the impact of the current price increase. However if the increase of wheat prices persists, many more households could be affected.

Afghanistan situation

Brahimi complains of interference

ISLAMABAD, Dec 7 : The head of the UN special peace mission for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, has said that everybody knows some of the countries around Afghanistan are directly helping the war efforts.

"Afghanistan is a war-torn country. It is a country that does not produce fuel, it does not produce food, it does not produce cloths and, above all, it does not produce weapons. It is true that the Russians did leave plenty of weapons, it is true that many of the tanks and planes that were left by the Soviet Union are still being used. But these need spare parts, above all they need ammunitions and these have to come from outside and they have to be brought in through the land, territories or air space of the neighbours", Brahimi said in an interview with the BBC.

He said that nothing important had happened, sporadic fighting was still going on.

TALIBAN RELEASE 450 PRISONERS: The Taliban released 450 prisoners from Kabul's main jail on Tuesday as a gesture a day before the start of Ramazan.

The prisoners, all adult males, were seen lined up outside the sprawling jail on the eastern edge of the city. Six coaches waited to take them away, as senior Taliban officials watched on.

"They were captured on the frontlines of Shamali and Tagab," said Mawlawi Mohammad Yasin, a security official.

"Some of them were captured in Kabul while carrying out subversive activities and making contact with the opposition. They are all military and political prisoners," he said, as he stood outside the jail on a dusty patch of ground littered with rusted tank bodies. "These people were our opponents and we released them in honour of the holy month of Ramazan. —AFP

DAWN 08 DEC 1999

Observer's column

Twenty years of Afghan tragedy

Brigadier (Retd) A.R. Siddiqi

Twenty years, two days to the day (Monday, December 27, 1999), Afghanistan completed its multiple ordeal by fire under foreign invasion and internal feuding, amounting to culpable national suicide. There is hardly a credible sign yet of the ordeal to end and the journey back to sanity and reconciliation to begin.

A quick glance through the various chapters of the great Afghan tragedy would unfold a complex web of palace intrigues eroding the very foundation of the state. The overthrow of the monarchy by Sardar Daud in July 1973, followed by the Sour Revolution of April 1978, created a dangerous vacuum to invite foreign military intervention. Nur Ahmad Tarakai and Hafizullah Amin, the men behind the pro-Soviet communist coup, fell a prey to their own devices. Hafizullah Amin, who engineered the assassination of Tarakai, was himself killed in the course of the palace infighting following the Soviet invasion.

That was the prologue to the great Afghan tragedy. Chapter one began with the storming of Kabul by the strong battalions, armour and airforce squadrons of the mighty Soviet forces – victors of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45. Divided in their ranks along tribal, sectarian and ethnic lines, the Afghans, nevertheless, rose in a body against the foreign invader in their time-honoured tradition. The odds were simply overwhelming, but the fierce will to fight to the bitter end made up for the vast material disparities.

For nearly three years (1979-82), the Afghans fought in the true spirit of a war of national liberation, galvanised by the Islamic *jihad* of their dedicated vision. The two fraternal neighbours – Iran and Pakistan, especially the latter – provided them such moral support and sanctuary as each could afford. Iran, being in the throes of its own revolution and the hostage crisis, acted mainly as a concerned bystander, Pakistan more actively as a cross-border friend and ally.

With the influx of the US aid in the first half of 1982, Pakistan emerged as the principal conduit of the US aid –arms and money - to Afghanistan. It became the logistical base and mainstay of the Afghan *jihad*. For the Afghan refugees, Pakistan became their principal sanctuary, almost their second home. That opened chapter two of the great Afghan Tragedy.

For America, the Afghan *jihad* came as a providential opportunity at the height of the cold War to see the Soviets go the Vietnam way in Afghanistan. Let America fight its greatest proxy war to the last Afghan Mujahid and Soviet conscript.

The tempo of the Afghan war picked up with the inflows of US aid, but its whole ethos and inspiration changed. From a dedicated national effort and Islamic *jihad*, it turned into a US-aided proxy war. US money and materials poured into Afghanistan via Pakistan, acting as the main dispenser of the bounty. The Afghan war emerged as a triangular play with heroes, the Afghan warriors on one side, and their backers, the US and Pakistan on the other. Among the warriors there were those treated more favourably than others to create frictions, misgivings and mistrust in the Mujahideen ranks.

That was the beginning of chapter three. Already divided in their ranks along ethnic, tribal and sectarian lines integral to the Afghan mindset, the intrusion of the pecuniary element tended to split them into mutually hostile groups. Money acts as the greatest divisive force when perceived as an inequitably dispensed largesse between two or more equally affected groups.

Ironically, the US funding of the Afghan *jihad* and its dispensation via Pakistan, instead of strengthening the Afghan *jihad* as an integrated effort against a common enemy, all but disintegrated it. Every major group complained about getting less than its due share of the largesse. Pakistan and America both were accused of playing favourites, leaning more on the Wahabi radicals like Hikmatyar (and like) than the moderate Hanafis like Rabbani and others. The Wahabi-Hanafi groups stood vertically divided.

That was the end of chapter four – 1984 through 1987. Interestingly, nearly all the US-aided groups through this phase – Hikmatyar, Rabbani, Sayyaf, Khalis Mojaddedi, Gilani, Mohammadi – lapsed into a relatively low profile as against Ahmad Shah Masood, the Lion of Panjsher, and Abdul Rashid Dostum. The two emerged as the principal heroes, giving the Soviet invader a taste of raw Afghan courage together with skilled generalship. This phase of the Afghan resistance (chapter five), also saw the emergence of the Great North-South divide, virtually, to split the country into two unequal halves. Masood-Dostum gained a decisive military edge on the Soviets, forcing them to look for an escape route. This, together with the sweeping changes under Mikhail Gorbachev, persuaded Moscow to backtrack, with or without the Geneva accords, already at an advanced stage.

The year 1987 saw the abdication of Babrak Karmal and the installation of Dr. Najibullah as the President of the Kabul regime.

In April 1988, the Geneva Accords were signed and sealed, but were yet to deliver, in spite of the US and USSR agreeing to act as international guarantors. In Pakistan itself, the Accords drove a wedge between President Ziaul Haq and Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo. Zia treated Junejo's initiative as a rude rebuff to his absolute authority and dismissed him towards the end of May 1988.

Chapter six of the great tragedy opened on the phased withdrawal of the Soviet forces getting under way. The Mujahideen mounted a concerted artillery assault on Jalalabad to open the road to Kabul. Each of the major Mujahideen groups – Hikmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami and Rabbani's Jamiat-i-Islami in the forefront – making a desperate bid for Kabul. The bid aborted in the face of the coordinated riposte of Najibullah's regulars. Fighting, however, continued until President Najibullah stepped down in April 1992 after a concerted assault by the combined forces of Masood and Dostum from the north. Najibullah sought sanctuary inside the UN compound in Kabul. It was the collapse of the Kabul-based central authority in Afghanistan and the beginning of the Afghan civil war.

Chapter seven began with the ISI-brokered Peshawar Accord on April 20, 1992, providing for the establishment of the interim Mujahideen governments by rotation until elections were held. First to form the patchwork of government was Mojaddedi, followed by Rabbani. Rabbani refused to quit at the end of his two terms by December 1993. Hikmatyar mounted a long and concerted artillery assault on Kabul, causing more destruction than nine years of the Soviet occupation.

Afghanistan was virtually split down the middle through the post-Najibullah phase of in-feuding. In 1994, the Taliban were first heard of and recognised a year later. The advent of the Taliban looked like the beginning of the end of Afghanistan's long ordeal. It was the most crucial and clinching phase of the great tragedy under chapter eight. The incredible epic of the Taliban triumphs and their conquest of Kabul in September 1996 left to whole world wondering and full of admiration for their exploits. However, rather than the grand finale, the fall of Kabul touched off the opening of yet another, and the most catastrophic, almost terminal phase of the Afghan ordeal. In May 1997 they captured Mazar-i-Sharif, heart of the North. Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia recognised the Taliban's Kabul regime as the de facto government of Afghanistan soon afterwards.

The Taliban failed to hold on to Mazar-i-Sharif, in the first instance. They regrouped and went for it again later in 1997 to capture and establish their hold there. In the course of the mopping up operations in the city, they raided the Iranian Consulate-General, killing and kidnapping a number of the diplomatic personnel. The incident created a war-like situation between Iran and the Taliban. Deployed all along the border, the two forces stood eyeball-to-eyeball. Fortunately, the Rubicon was not crossed and the two forces withdrew to their normal peacetime locations. The incident did, however, leave a long trail of bitterness and confrontation between the two countries.

While the final chapter of the great Afghan tragedy is yet to conclude, the country continues to transit from one critical phase to another, worse than the previous one. Taliban-Afghanistan represents three-fourths of the country and yet its legitimacy goes abegging internationally.

The Taliban have enforced rather than established their writ within the territory under their control. The kind of popular support which would ultimately serve as the sole basis of their legitimacy is still lacking, usama bin Laden, as an honoured guest continues to enjoy their protection and hospitality in the best Pathan tradition. But it can't go on for very much longer in the face of the mounting US and international pressures.

The calculated slant and mendacity of Western media notwithstanding, Taliban-Afghanistan is recognised more as a source of terrorism – the world's largest poppy-growing area for drug trafficking and violation of human rights – than as an orderly, civilised state. Here is also a warning for the world, especially for the West to heed.

An isolated Afghanistan would have the potential of destabilising much of Asia, especially its Central and Southern zones, with varying fallout elsewhere.

A destabilised Afghanistan may well transform the great Afghan tragedy into a sort of sci-fi thriller – with country labs churning out tons of refined heroin and Pathan botanists experimenting with novel varieties of poppy and cannabis. This would be in addition to the dedicated activism of the *Mullas* to export their variety of Islam farther afield.

Diarrhoea claims lives of 85,000 Afghan children yearly

KABUL, Dec 13: Some 85,000 children die of diarrhoea every year in Afghanistan, UN officials said during the launch of The State of the World's Children 2000 programme on Monday.

The ceremony to mark the event was held in Jalalabad, capital of the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar.

"We want peace, we want peace," pleaded eight-year-old Afghan boy Laiq Saeed, who lost one leg and the fingers of one hand in a landmine accident three years ago, according to the UN Children's Fund.

The call was echoed by adult speakers at the gathering, including the UN regional coordinating officer Abu-El Gasim Abu-Diek, who appealed to governments to bring global conflicts to an end.

"Wars have put children and mothers into a deadly destiny of no return. The basic needs of food, medicine and clothing have now become wants for millions of Afghans," A Unicef statement quoted Abu-Diek as saying.

"About 35 per cent of all landmine victims in Afghanistan are children, and too many women and children are dying of preventable causes," he said.

Unicef resident project officer Anoja Wijeyesekera said that in Afghanistan alone some 85,000 children died of diarrhoea every year.

"Despite the pledges made by world leaders, today at the dawn of the new millennium, 160 million children are still without access to education," she said, adding 60 per cent of them were girls.

About 150 Afghan women attending a separate meeting in Jalalabad said in a statement their main concern for the 21st century was the future of their children.

"Our children, both boys and girls, should grow up healthy, happy and have a good life," the statement said. The women prayed for the restoration of peace to Afghanistan.—AFP

DAWN 14 DEC 1999

Thousands of Afghans disabled by war: report

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR, Dec 13: Out of the total 20 million population of the war-ravaged Afghanistan, some four per cent are disabled persons, according to data compiled by the Peshawar office of Comprehensive Disabled Afghans' Programme (CDAP), an inter-agency initiative of UNDP and UNOPS, providing services to disabled people in Afghanistan.

Half of the disabled population is constituted by those hit by sensory disabilities; majority of them suffer from blindness, deafness and mental retardation, says a CDAP document.

A larger number of people hit by sensory disabilities have been rendered so due to pre-natal and post-natal complications caused by the after-affects of a prolonged war in Afghanistan.

Of the remaining 50 per cent disabled persons, some 25 per cent have been hit by polio and as many amputated due to the devastation caused by the war and explosion of land mines.

" The war has disabled thousands, creating amputees, blindness and paralysis whereas weak preventive services have also resulted in a high incidence of disabling diseases such as polio and tuberculosis," says the CDAP document.

Launched in 1995, the CDAP has so far spent some US$8.80 million for the rehabilitation of disabled people in Afghanistan.

DAWN 14 DEC 1999

UN expedites relief work in Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - The United Nations authorities in Afghanistan have expedited distribution of essential food items and other relief activities in various parts of war-torn Afghanistan.

According to UN weekly update, the first phase of the UN crosslines assistance, started after positive negotiations with both the parties, for Afghans from Shomali who were displaced into the Panjsher valley has been completed on December 10 with the safe arrival of fifth convey through which 750 tons of food and essential non food items including warm cloths and blankets were distributed.

Despite food assistance UNICEF also launched " state of world's children 2000" in Jalalabad in which a number of boys participated. The UN regional coordinator officers on this occasion told that millions of Afghans needed food, medicines and clothing. He further said that 35 percent of landmines victims in Afghanistan are children. He said that 85000 children died of diarrhoea every year in Afghanistan.

In a separate meeting for women, in Jalalabad, the Afghan women declared that their main concern for the 21st century is the future of their children, good child health services and an effective education system to enable the boys and girls to achieve their highest potential.

Similarly, UNDP established five female physiotherapy clinics equipped with modern tools, for the assistance of poor women in Farah province. For these clinics UNOPS/CDAP trained female physiotherapists in Kandhar last year. UNICEF Kabul organized a three-months basic training on midwifery skills in which 11 women from Logar province are participated . Similarly WHO conducted a five days workshop for 20 medical doctors on control, prevention and management of complicated and non complicated Malaria cases in Kunduz province.

Full therapeutic requirements for 100 tuberculosis patients were also provided in Herat regional hospital and with the collaboration of WFP distributed 14.76 MT of food in the hospital and 6.96 MT similar food to Herat TB Control Centre of the regional hospital. WHO also distributed anti-malarial drugs and equipments to the Malaria Units of Imama Sahib District.

In November 20 schools for girls and boys were opened in Kandhar region, nine for girls, nine for boys and two for co-education. In Kabul UNICEF provided education supplies such as pocket boards and cards with alphabet and in some centers , the children education is followed by vocational training in carpet weaving and shoe making.

In Jalalabad, WFP and WHO had started second phase of sanitation project in the city which first phase started in 1994. Due to major increase in population and influx of displaced persons from Kabul, the city sanitation infrastructure was overwhelmed which led to various diseases.

In the second phase, paid with food work, laborers clean the existing drainage system , dig drainage canals, clean existing culverts and construct new ones, smooth and gravel the road, fill in waterlogged areas and increase sanitation awareness in the community. Sixty percent of the city has now been covered under the sanitation project and 6,000 tons of wheat has been distributed.

In Maidan Shar of Wardak province pipe water supply project has been completed with the technical and financial support of UNICEF. In Gardez five hand pumps were installed on wells and DACAAR has completed a water supply and environmental sanitation project in Moqoor, Ghazni province. 50 wells and handpumps will provide clean water to almost 1500 families while 150 baths and latrines will also benefits 150 families.

Similarly one week vaccination training for women in Kabul , Nangahar and Logar provinces was arranged. Women equipped with vaccination kit will work as poultry vaccinators in their villages. The animal health and production activities in 255 veterinary fields units continued to operate smoothly.

During the last month three integrated past management sub-projects were completed in UNDCP target districts of Maiwand, Ghorak and Khakrez districts of Kandahar province.

NATION 17 DEC 1999

Only UNOCHA 'Flight Operations in Afghanistan' need $ 3 million

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD – A headline carried in our Monday's edition on its back page gave the impression as if all the United Nations relief operations on humanitarian grounds being carried out by the United Nations Office for Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) in Afghanistan need an assistance of US$ 3 million for its operations.

The headline gave wrong impression as it is actually only the 'Flight Operations' of UNOCHA being conducted with the help of two Beach King aircraft which require a total funding of US$ 3 million to meet its annual operational costs.

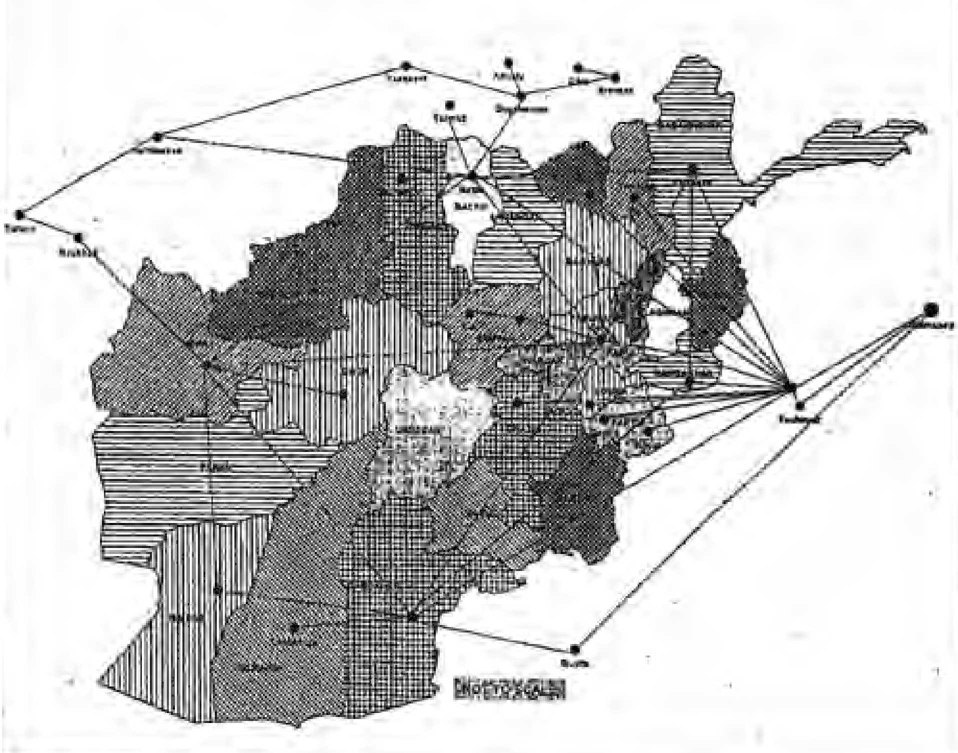
UNOCHA has got two aircraft, one Beach King-200 with a total capacity for 10 passengers or 1,000 kg of cargo and the other Beach King-1900 with a total capacity for 19 passengers or 2,600 kg of cargo.

These aircraft are undertaking daily routine flights to various destinations inside Afghanistan and even beyond the war-torn country into the Central Asian States of the former Soviet Union. Besides the routine flights these aircraft are also being chartered by various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the UN missions based in the region.

The UNOCHA has got these two aircraft on wet lease from a Danish company which cost the UN agency an amount of US$ 3 million to meet its annual operational costs. In the past UNOCHA has been meeting these costs through donations from some donnor countries. However, for the year 2000 it has received no commitment for support of its 'Flight Operations' inside Afghanistan and beyond.

UNOCHA covers eight different destinations inside Afghanistan including Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat, Kandhar, Mazar Sharif, Faizabad, Rustaq and Khawaja Ghar. In the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union the UNOCHA aircraft reach to Temrez and Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Dushanbe in Tajikistan, Ashakabad in Turkmenistan, Bishkek in Kirgistan and Almaty in Kazkhastan. In addition these UNOCHA aircraft also touch down in Tehran and Mashahd in Iran.

DESTINATIONS COVERED BY UN 201/202



NATION 28 DEC 1999

Taliban media: US issues 'fact-sheet'

WASHINGTON, Nov 30: The US State Department on Tuesday issued a detailed fact-sheet to clarify what it called "distortions" created by the Taliban-controlled mass media in Afghanistan and even some Pakistani newspapers about UN sanctions on Taliban.

"The Taliban-controlled mass media in Afghanistan, regional, and international media are distorting the content and expected effects of the sanctions against the Taliban unanimously imposed by the UN — including by Bahrain, Malaysia and China," the fact-sheet said.

Detailing the most common distortions, described in the fact- sheet as "fallacies" the State Department gave para by para replies to each "fallacy" to "counter these untruths."

The main fallacies listed include the charges that the UN sanctions were aimed against the people of Afghanistan; that the US wanted to impose its own puppet regime of enslavement on Afghans to prevent the introduction of Shariat; that the US is anti-Islam, that UN sanctions will devastate health care in Afghanistan or because of the sanctions, trade will dry up and, consequently, thousands of Pakistanis will lose their jobs.

It also listed as a fallacy a comment in *Dawn* which said the US refuses to talk to the Taliban and it showed indecent haste in imposing sanctions and not giving mediation a chance.

Countering these fallacies with "facts" the fact-sheet said UN sanctions were not against Afghanistan or against the Afghan people. "The Taliban movement, which refuses to cooperate with the international community, is the target of the sanctions," it said.

On the charge of imposing a puppet regime in Afghanistan, it said the fact was that the resolution which was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council, including US, Bahrain, Malaysia, China, and 11 other countries, was solely focused on terrorism.

"The text of the resolution explicitly states respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan," it said.

Refuting that the US was anti-Islam, the fact-sheet said: "The US, and the international community, as represented by the UN Security Council, have no quarrel with Islam. Islam is one of the fastest-growing faiths in the US. Over six million Muslims practice their faith freely in hundreds of mosques in the US."

Denying that the UN sanctions will devastate health care in Afghanistan, the fact-sheet said: "The UN sanctions were carefully crafted to minimize the impact on the Afghan people. They allow humanitarian activity and private trade to continue. Almost all trade in Afghanistan is conducted by the private sector. Traders are free to continue to import medicine and medical supplies into Afghanistan. Even before the sanctions took effect, it was the Taliban itself which refused to supply minimally acceptable health care to the people of Afghanistan, preferring to expend its resources to continue the senseless civil war."

On the question of thousands of Pakistanis losing their jobs as trade with Afghanistan will dry up, the fact sheet said: "The UN Sanctions do not address private trade. They target only the aircraft, bank accounts, and other financial assets of the Taliban. Private trade will continue, as it always has in Afghanistan."

Denying that poverty will soar in Afghanistan, the fact-sheet said there was no reason for sanctions to affect remittances to ordinary citizens. "The Universal Postal Union has already offered to help Afghanistan receive mail by overland routes. If the Taliban wish to cooperate in this effort, it can. Furthermore, most remittances reach Afghanistan through the informal banking system of transfers by money-changers (hundi), which is commonly used in the Middle East and South Asia."

On the comment by *Dawn* that the US refuses to talk to Taliban, the fact-sheet said: "The UN Security Council Resolution 1267 is clear. In order for UN sanctions to be lifted, Osama bin Laden must be turned over to authorities in a country where he can be brought to justice.

"The US has met with various Taliban officials more than 20 times. To date, our discussions with the Taliban have not resulted in any resolution of the matter of bin Laden, but we are prepared to continue these discussions."

Countering the accusation that the US wanted to use the UN sanctions to starve the Afghan people into submission, the fact- sheet said: "Almost all trade in foodstuffs is conducted by the private sector in Afghanistan. The UN sanctions do not prohibit private trade. Further, neither US nor UN sanctions prohibit the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including food, to Afghanistan. In fact, in response to the most recent food crisis caused by the dramatic increase of internally displaced persons as a result of the Taliban military offensives and of their scorched-earth policy, the US has pledged $575,000 and is considering additional contributions which will likely total over $1 million for emergency humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

"This year," it said, "the U.S. provided the ICRC with $47.8 million for its South Asia programmes, the bulk of which is used to respond to conflict victims and internally displaced persons in Afghanistan. US assistance for Afghans inside and outside their country in this past fiscal year totalled over $70 million.

"The US urges the Taliban to ensure that food assistance reaches the neediest in Afghanistan, including women and children and those families who have been displaced by the Taliban military operations.

DAWN
01 DEC 1999

Sanctions not aimed against Afghans: US envoy

DAWN
04 DEC 1999

ISLAMABAD, Dec 3: The US ambassador to Pakistan, William B. Milam, has described as Taliban-sponsored disinformation the claims that the UN sanctions are aimed against the people of Afghanistan.

"The UN sanctions are not against Afghanistan. They are not against the Afghan people. The Taliban movement, which refuses to cooperate with the international community on terrorism, is the target of the sanctions, and not the Afghan people," Mr Milam said while addressing the English Speaking Union of Lahore.

Defending the US and the UN position vis-a-vis sanctions against the Taliban, he spurned the notion that UN sanctions were intended to injure the Afghan people and to increase their suffering. "Nothing could be father from the truth," the ambassador said.

He said the sanctions were carefully crafted to minimize the impact on the Afghan people. "They allow humanitarian activity and private trade to continue. Traders are free to continue to import medicine and medical supplies to Afghanistan," Mr Milam said.

He said the US sanctions did not address trade relations. "They target only the aircraft, bank accounts, and other financial assets of the Taliban. Trade and commerce will continue, as they always have in Afghanistan," the envoy asserted.

He said there was no reason for sanctions to affect remittances to ordinary citizens. "The Universal Postal Union has already offered to help Afghanistan receive mail by overland routes.

If the Taliban wish to cooperate this effort, they can. Moreover, most remittances reach Afghanistan through the informal banking system of transfers by money changers, which is commonly used in the Middle East and South Asia," he noted.

Mr Milam described as a fallacy that the US refused to talk to the Taliban. "The US at high levels has met with various Taliban officials more 20 times in the past year. To date, our discussions with the Taliban have not resulted in any resolutions of the matter of bin Laden, but we are prepared to continue these discussion."

He said the US had no intention to use the UN sanctions to starve the Afghan people into submission.

"The US urges the Taliban to ensure that food assistance reaches the neediest in Afghanistan, including women and children and those families who have been displaced by the Taliban military operations," the ambassador added.—NNI

US believes curbs against Taliban better tool

WASHINGTON (PPI) – The United States does not expect that sanctions against the Taliban are going to be "a quick fix and they have not obviously been a quick fix, but we believe they are the appropriate tool.

"Targeted the way they are on specific enterprises that the leadership benefits from, we believe they are the right course of action considering that Afghanistan still continues to harbor— and the Taliban continues to harbor— an internationally wanted terrorist who is responsible for the murder of Kenyans, Tanzanians and of hundreds of American citizens," said US State Department Spokesman James Rubin. At a briefing on Wednesday he stressed that sanctions have never been an instrument that lead to an "instant accomplishment" of their objectives. "We have carefully targeted these sanctions to avoid any unnecessary impact on the civilian population in Afghanistan.

03 DEC 1999
NATION

US warns Taliban

WASHINGTON, Dec 14: The United States will hold the Taliban "responsible" for any future anti-American "terrorist attacks organized by Osama bin Laden", the State Department said on Tuesday.

Department spokesman James Foley said the message had been transmitted to the Taliban's New York representative, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, by Michael Sheehan, US special coordinator for fighting anti-American acts.

Earlier in the day, a US official said a dozen people linked to Bin Laden who were planning New Year's attacks against Americans had been arrested in the Middle East in the past two weeks.

The official confirmed that suspects had been arrested and said the detentions were related to a worldwide alert, warning US citizens about possible attack during the holiday season. —AFP

DAWN
15 DEC 1999

US announces more aid for Afghan women

By Our Staff Correspondent

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: President Clinton announced on Monday a 3.5 million dollar aid programme for Afghan women and children and urged the Taliban government to restore their human rights.

Speaking at a White House ceremony to honour five human rights activists who got awards, the president and Mrs. Clinton focussed on the situation of women and children in Afghanistan and condemned the atrocities against them.

The "abuse of Afghan women" by the Taliban "must be stopped once and for all," Mrs. Clinton told the gathering, which included five Americans receiving the 1999 Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Awards. Also attending were leaders of human rights groups and members of the administration and Congress.

"We're dramatically expanding our re-settlement programme for women and children who are not safe where they are," Clinton said.

But, he said, these are just temporary solutions. "The Taliban must stop violating the rights of women, and respect the human rights of all people. And we must continue to work until the day when Afghanistan has a government that reflects the wisdom of its people."

Introducing the President was Belquis Ahmadi, a 27-year-old former Kabul law student and a woman activist who now lives in the United States with her siblings.

She told the crowd that she had fled Afghanistan for Pakistan in 1996 after the Taliban regime had stopped women from working outside the home, from attending school and even from getting medical treatment in hospitals.

Clinton said that in nearly half the world today "doing what Belquis just did — simply standing up and speaking freely could get her arrested, jailed, beaten, even tortured. That's why we're here today."

The President then introduced the winners of the awards "whose work close to home has made the whole world a better place. May their work continue to inspire us all for generations yet to come."

Clinton established the awards in 1998 to honour the leading role played by former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in advancing the adoption in 1948 by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Clinton told the group that "the real genius of the Declaration of Human Rights is that it affirmeo that basic human rights are not cultural, but universal; that what a country does to people within its own borders is not its business alone, but the business of all of us," he said.

DAWN 09 DEC 1999

US helped Afghan rebels before Soviet invasion

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Despite formal denials, the United States launched a covert operation to bolster anti-Communist guerillas in Afghanistan at least six months before the 1979 Soviet invasion of the country, according to a former top US official.

'We actually did provide some support to the mujahedeen before the invasion,' former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told AFP 20 years after Moscow's ill-fated foray into Afghanistan.

Asked what form it took and what agency was in charge of it, he replied: 'The difference between arms and money is theoretical, isn't it? ... It certainly was not run by the Red Cross.'

The Carter administration had consistently denied any attempt to undermine the Afghan governments of Nur Mohammad Taraki and his successor, Hafizullah Amin.

But Brzezinski, former Central Intelligence Agency director Stansfield Turner and others acknowledged that the Taraki-led coup in April of 1978 had been interpreted in Washington as an another Communist victory.

'We felt that he was more under the control of the Soviets than his predecessor,' said Turner.

Faced with growing resistance, the Taraki government was indeed bombarding Moscow with requests for military assistance.

'We need practical and technical help in both men and weapons,' Taraki told then Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin in a March 18, 1979, telephone conversation, according to Soviet archive documents.

The Soviets, at first reluctantly then more eagerly, began to yield to the blandishments.

'They acquired a greater stake in what was happening in Afghanistan,' said Teresita Schaffer, a veteran US diplomat, who served at the State Department's Pakistan desk at the time of the Soviet invasion.

By the summer of 1979, said Brzezinski, Soviet intentions were clear to him. 'I gave the President (Jimmy Carter) a memorandum in the middle of that year, about six months before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that in my view, the Soviets would invade,' he recalled. It was at that time, said Brzezinski, that he put forward his proposal to provide covert aid to the mujahedeen.

'There was some evidence of growing resistance in Afghanistan, to which we were not entirely indifferent,' he pointed out. There would be many obstacles to overcome before the program initiated by Brzezinski would grow into the largest US covert operation since World War II worth a staggering two billion dollars.

NATION 12 DEC 1999

US covert operation in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, Dec 12: Despite formal denials, the United States launched a covert operation to bolster anti-Communist guerrillas in Afghanistan at least six months before the 1979 Soviet invasion of the country, according to a former top US official.

"We actually did provide some support to the Mujahedeen before the invasion," former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told AFP 20 years after Moscow's ill-fated foray into Afghanistan.

Asked what form it took and what agency was in charge of it, he replied: "The difference between arms and money is theoretical, isn't it? ... It certainly was not run by the Red Cross."

The Carter administration had consistently denied any attempt to undermine the Afghan governments of Nur Mohammad Taraki and his successor, Hafizullah Amin.

But Brzezinski, former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Stansfield Turner and others acknowledged that the Taraki-led coup in April of 1978 had been interpreted in Washington as an another Communist victory.

"We felt that he was more under the control of the Soviets than his predecessor," said Turner.

Faced with growing resistance, the Taraki government was indeed bombarding Moscow with requests for military assistance.

"We need practical and technical help in both men and weapons," Taraki told then Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin in a March 18, 1979, telephone conversation, according to Soviet archive documents.

The Soviets, at first reluctantly then more eagerly, began to yield to the blandishments.

"They acquired a greater stake in what was happening in Afghanistan," said Teresita Schaffer, a veteran US diplomat, who served at the State Department's Pakistan desk at the time of the Soviet invasion.

By the summer of 1979, said Brzezinski, Soviet intentions were clear to him.

"I gave the president (Jimmy Carter) a memorandum in the middle of that year, about six months before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that in my view, the Soviets would invade," he recalled.

There would be many obstacles to overcome before the programme initiated by Brzezinski would grow into the largest US covert operation since World War II worth a staggering $2 billion.

As Soviet troops poured into Afghanistan on December 27, skeptics in the Carter administration argued the country was doomed.

One of the most prominent member of that camp was, surprisingly, CIA Director Turner.

"I believed that they would be able to conquer Afghanistan with 120,000 well-equipped troops," he reminisced in an interview with AFP.

According to Schaffer, the State Department was split between Soviet specialists and Asia experts.

"The Russian experts felt that Afghanistan would become like Soviet Central Asia, that ... ultimately the resistance would fail," she said. "The South Asia watchers, I think, had a more open mind."

Brzezinski said that on the first day after the Soviet invasion, he gave President Carter a memorandum, "in which the most significant sentence was 'We now have the opportunity to give the Soviet Union its Vietnam'."

But it would not be until 1985 that the Reagan administration would decide to aim for full military victory in Afghanistan, implicitly adopting the Brzezinski approach.—AFP

DAWN 13 DEC 1999

Washington warns Taliban against Osama attacks

By Shaheen Sehbai

WASHINGTON, Dec 16: The US has warned the Taliban of "serious consequences" if supporters of Osama bin Laden attack Americans anywhere in the world, following the arrest of a number of suspected terrorists in Jordan.

White House, Pentagon and State Department spokesmen made statements in concert after news broke that Jordan had arrested several Jordanians, Iraqis and Algerians who recently returned from Afghanistan.

None of them was a Pakistani, a State Department official said.

All these spokesmen stopped short of saying that cruise missiles would again be used against Afghanistan, but they made it clear that the warning had been conveyed to the Taliban in New York by the US coordinator for counter-terrorism, Michael Sheehan, who met Taliban representative Abdul Hakeem Mujahid.

"We wanted to make sure they understood that their support in harbouring the bin Laden organization was noted here in the US and any activity ... we would hold them responsible for," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart.

Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon refused to say whether the US military might be preparing for any action against the Taliban if bin Laden's followers attacked Americans.

"It is not only my job to announce potential military actions; it is also my job specifically to avoid commenting on military contingencies, unless directed to do so," Bacon said.

"We've demonstrated our ability many times in the past, and I think the government has made it very clear that it's serious in its dealings with the Taliban. And also, it's very seriously devoted to stopping threats from terrorist, threats from Osama bin Laden or from other terrorist organizations. I don't think I should say anything more," the Pentagon spokesman said.

Asked to elaborate on what was meant by "serious consequences," State Department spokesman Jim Foley said that's a term of *art* in the field of diplomacy and it's serious, and "I'm not going to spell out what it means. But in diplomatic parlance, though, that's strong language".

Asked about the Taliban representative's response to Sheehan's warning, Foley said he (the representative) left the meeting without any doubt as to the seriousness of the attitude of the US towards the consequences should there be any terrorist attack by bin Laden.

Lockhart said: "I'm not going to get into specifics. We just wanted to make sure they understood that their support and harbouring of the bin Laden organization was noted here in the US and that any activity that moved forward, we would hold them responsible for".

DAWN 17 DEC 1999

Milam calls on Taliban envoy

PESHAWAR (NNI) – Islamabad based US envoy William B. Milam called on Taliban envoy Syed Muhammad Haqqani here at the Afghan Embassy Wednesday, diplomatic sources said. Sources said Milam who sought the meeting lauded the Taliban's positive role in Indian Airliner's hijacking episode and stressed them to adopt similar approach towards Osama Bin Laden's issue.

Sources added that Milam told Haqqani that the US will wait for their response to its request but Haqqani made it clear to him that Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has a clear stand over the issue and there is no chance that it will be changed. The sources have termed the meeting as fruitless.

The Taliban envoy was reached for the confirmation of the meeting but he was neither home not at his office.

NATION 30 DEC 1999

US allows supply of medicines to Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (APP)–The US government has allowed supply of medicines to Afghanistan.

According to a Zee television report, medicines will be supplied to the war-torn country by air.

The members of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) are of the view that despite the sanction imposed against Afghanistan, supply of medicine is meant for the human welfare.

NATION 20 DEC 1999

Russia's Afghanistan veterans still scarred

MOSCOW (AFP) - Captain Viktor Karpukhin realized he was headed for a 'special' mission in Afghanistan when he was issued his summer uniform in December 1979.

Exactly 20 years on, Karpukhin who headed an advance commando into Kabul and the other veterans of the 10-year campaign are still scarred by a war that cost 14,000 Russian lives, left 50,000 wounded and killed one million Afghans.

In all, half a million soldiers were sent to fight in Afghanistan and many veterans now feel excluded from Russian society, says the 52-year-old Karpukhin, who has been promoted to the rank of general.

'Many drink heavily, others have turned to crime,' says Karpukhin, who now heads the largest veteran group, 'Combat Brotherhood'.

Other veterans have been more successful in business however, benefiting for example from special tax exemptions.

Yet violent clashes within their ranks, such as a shoot-out which left 14 dead and 13 wounded three years ago at a Moscow cemetery, prompted the government to abolish their privileges.

On December 23, 1979, Karpukhin led 38 soldiers of the 'Alfa' anti-terrorist group, who along with 500 Soviet paratroopers, landed at Begram airport, next to Kabul, two days before 40,000 Red Army soldiers poured over the Afghan border.

Karpukhin's advance group was stationed in the Soviet embassy in Kabul, within close range of President Hafizullah Amin's palace, awaiting further instructions.

'On December 27, we were ordered to take the Presidential palace. We did and lost two men,' he recalls.

'No one had ordered us to shoot Amin. He was killed during the fighting,' he says.

The following day, Moscow's man, Prime Minister Babrak Karmal, took Amin's seat as President.

The chain of events which led to the invasion began around March 1979, as clashes opposed the country's communist authorities and Islamist fighters, leaving Soviet power split over its response.

'The people would never forgive us if we sent troops to Afghanistan,' had claimed at the time Alexei Kosygin who headed the Soviet government.

But secret records of Politburo meetings now made public show how contentious the issue was within the higher spheres of Soviet power.

The hardliners's position was summed by then Soviet foreign affairs minister Andrei Gromyko: 'We must never loose Afghanistan, whatever the cost.'

Kremlin hawks finally won over as Islamist fighters claimed the military upperhand. They decided to send 'a limited contingent to help Afghanistan under the friendship treaty' which bound both countries.

Soviet military leaders were issued with orders only on the eve of the intervention.

The first casualties were soon to follow. Among them, 44 paratroopers died after their transport plane ran into a mountain-side four hours into the invasion.

The Afghanistan war, or simply the 'Afghan' as Russians refer to the conflict, is now considered a political mistake, but its lesson still divides Russian society.

'We have not learned from the war. The same mistakes are now being committed in Chechnya,' says General Boris Gromov who led the Red Army's pull-out from Afghanistan in 1989.

Karpukhin however disagrees. 'These wars have little in common. Afghanistan was an ideological conflict. Chechnya is an operation against terrorists,' he says.

Today, Russian soldiers about to be sent to Chechnya still train on make-shift sand hills their elders had used before them, but instead of representing Afghanistan, these mounds now stand for Chechnya's rugged mountains.

NATION 24 DEC 1999

— Kuwait also

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 7: The Kuwaiti central bank has ordered banks and investment houses to freeze the Taliban's assets, in keeping with UN sanctions, newspapers reported on Tuesday.

The governor, Sheikh Salem Abdel Aziz al-Sabah, said the move was in line with the country's policy of "respect for international resolutions".

The UN security council last month slapped sanctions on the Taliban — an air traffic embargo and a freeze on its assets abroad — for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden.

Sheikh Salem asked for a list of frozen accounts to be delivered to the central bank within a week, Al-Rai al-Aam newspaper said.

In July, Kuwaiti police on the border with Saudi Arabia arrested an Arab allegedly serving as a courier to deliver forged Kuwaiti citizenship papers to Bin Laden.

And a newspaper reported in August that a Kuwaiti was killed in Afghanistan fighting for the Taliban against opposition forces.—AFP

DAWN

08 DEC 1999

Iran awaits concrete Pak steps on Afghanistan

TEHRAN (AFP) - Former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani said Monday Iran was waiting to see Pakistani leader General Pervez Musharraf take concrete steps to achieve reconciliation in Afghanistan, the official IRNA agency reported.

'We have seen a glimmer of hope of a change in policy towards Afghanistan in Pakistan and we are now waiting for concrete actions from General Musharraf and the Pakistani government,' Rafsanjani said during a meeting in Tehran with ousted Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Rafsanjani, who is currently chairman of the Expediency Council, which arbitrates on disputes within the regime, said that Iran hoped to see a coalition government representing all factions and ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

Rabbani's visit comes less than two weeks after Musharraf visited Tehran, during which he said Tehran and Islamabad had agreed to coordinate their policies 'for encouraging the peace process through reconciliation and dialogue among the Afghan parties.'

'After Mr. Musharraf's comments in Tehran, we hope that Islamabad's position will change and evolve regarding the restoration of peace and security in Afghanistan,' IRNA reported Rafsanjani as saying. For his part, Rabbani briefed Rafsanjani on recent developments regarding the political, economic and military situation in Afghanistan and thanked Iran for its humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan, IRNA said.

NATION

21 DEC 1999

Iran for coalition govt in Afghanistan

TEHRAN, Dec 21: Iranian President Mohammed Khatami on Tuesday called for the formation of a coalition government in Afghanistan to restore peace to the country, the official agency IRNA reported.

"An independent and stable government in Afghanistan is needed to re-establish peace and stability in the region," Khatami said during a meeting with ousted Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who is visiting Tehran.

The Iranian president said that the United Nations' growing efforts to bring about a resolution in the country were bearing fruit.

At the same time, Khatami criticized certain Afghan groups for drug trafficking.

"The international community is today more than ever concerned about insecurity, terrorism and the increase in Afghanistan's drug production," Khatami said.

For his part, Rabbani asked Khatami "to make more effort to re-establish peace and security" in Afghanistan.

Rabbani said he welcomed "all Iranian initiatives which encouraged the various Afghan parties and neighbouring countries to enter peace talks," IRNA said.

On Monday, former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani said Iran was waiting to see Gen Pervez Musharraf take concrete steps to achieve reconciliation in Afghanistan.

"We have seen a glimmer of hope of a change in policy towards Afghanistan in Pakistan and we are now waiting for concrete actions from Gen Musharraf and the Pakistan government," Rafsanjani said during a meeting in Tehran with Rabbani.—AFP

DAWN

22 DEC 1999

Iran offers help to Kabul

TEHRAN, Dec 27: Iran on Monday offered to help Afghanistan resolve the crisis over the hijacking after India asked for Iranian assistance, Tehran radio reported.

"Iran is following the case with deep concern and will do anything within its capabilities to help resolve the issue," the state radio quoted Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi as telling his Indian counterpart by telephone.

The radio said Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh had telephoned Kharrazi and called for Iran's help.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran opposes and condemns any terrorist action which endangers the lives of innocent individuals," Kharrazi said.—Reuters

DAWN 28 DEC 1999

RAWA calls upon world to help end HR violations in Afghanistan



RAWA women and children protesting in front of UN office in Islamabad, against human rights violations in Afghanistan.–*The Nation* photo

By Farhat Abbas

ISLAMABAD – Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has called upon all pro-democracy organisations of the world not to be mere spectators to the violations of human rights and great tragedy in Afghanistan but raise voice against the fundamentalists and prove their sincerity to the people and particularly women in practice. This was demanded by the protestors of RAWA on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, while demonstrating in front of the offices of United Nations situated in Saudi Pak Tower, Blue Area, Islamabad, on Friday morning.

The participants said that Afghan women who are fighting for the freedom could only break the chain of Taliban and Jihadi through decisive and irreconcilable struggle side by side with freedom-loving men. "Only thus can they attain freedom and human and democratic rights", said one of the protestors. He said despite being under enemy fire from all sides, RAWA would continue to shoulder the banner of struggle against Taliban and Jihadi forces.

The protestors who were holding placards in their hands complainted that efforts by the United Nations or any other international body for the restoration of peace in Afghanistan would be in vain and of no value to the people of Afghanistan unless they stipulate total disarmament and identification and persecution of hotbeds of belligerent fundamentalists. The protestors reiterated that any peace initiative in Afghanistan based on bringing Jihadi and Taliban together would signify nothing but contemptuous disdain for the aggrieving people of Afghanistan.

They said the Rome meeting initiated by Zahir Shah was a positive sign in a sense that it was against the Jihadis and Taliban but the absence of women and pre-democracy and anti-fundamentalist organisations and personalities in it and showing a compromising attitude towards the fundamentalists were its main defects and that is why it was underestimated by many in Afghanistan.

They were of the view that the UN sanctions which were seemed to be imposed on Taliban would not have any important impact on them as they are much affluent in dollars and pounds, but as a matter of fact it is our poor people who would be affected the most. They said it is disgusting that Jihadis have been exempted from the sanctions and it means giving preference to Jihadis by the UN and US and planning to prepare them for another round of bloody rule.

They said that RAWA strongly opposed such sanctions that apart from the above mentioned negative aspects, they would lead to strengthen the Jihadis. They said the US or any other government if really wants to help the people of Afghanistan they must first and foremost impose strict curbs on those countries which continue to nurture the Taliban and their Jihadis rival with arm and money.

The protestors reiterated that any effort to resolve the Afghan problem would be of no value if it does not consider women's right and democratic freedoms and meanwhile supports this or that Jihadi groups. They said only those countries would be regarded as friends who in true sense are busy in eliminating human rights violations from Afghanistan.

They said for the formation of free, independent and democratically free Afghanistan, the joint striving and struggle of pro-liberty and democratic forces are indispensable. They said the objective can only be achieved through relentless struggle, not through compromise and capitulation.

At the end they expressed their solidarity to the struggle of the freedom-loving forces in Iran, Kashmir, Khurdistan, Palestine, Sudan, Asia, Africa, Latin America and other parts of the world.

NATION 11 DEC 1999

Pakistan freezes bank accounts of Taliban

ISLAMABAD (NNI) – Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar on Tuesday said that Pakistan has closed branches of the Afghan banks on its soil and frozen bank accounts of the Taliban to implement the UN Security Council resolution calling for sanctions on Afghanistan.

"This is the requirement of UN Charter and under the sanctions, Pakistan had closed branches of Afghan banks on its soil and frozen bank accounts of Taliban. We are also taking action with regard to Afghan property here and that its warning should not go to Kabul, he said in an interview with IRNA a day before the visit of the chief executive General Musharraf to Tehran.

However, he said that Pakistan at the same time, apprehended that the sanctions might lead to a humanitarian tragedy and further influx of refugees to Pakistan. He said Pakistan is concerned for the sufferings of people of Afghanistan and is trying to bring this to the notice of International community.

The minister said that relations between the two countries are distinguished. But real question in how to activate and gear up the existing mechanisms for the expansion of these ties. He said Islamabad wanted to explore further cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"We in Pakistan deeply admire the leadership of Imam Khomeini who led Iran to self-respect as a nation, Abdul Sattar said adding that Islamabad looked forward to demonstration of close relations that existed between the two countries. Our bilateral relations are distinguished by closeness and interaction. But we want to explore ways to build an edifice on the strong foundation that already exists between our two national he exerted.

About the visit of General Pervez Musharraf to Tehran, Abdul Sattar said that basically it was a goodwill visit, demonstrating the importance that Pakistan attaches to Iran. He said that detail discussions would not be possible during the visit but we hope to speak about implementation of projects that have already been agreed upon. He referred to the bilateral agreements on laying of Railway Line between the two countries, the Pak-Iran Oil Refinery and laying of Gas Pipeline.

Dwelling upon the Afghan imbroglio, Abdul Sattar said Iran and Pakistan were both committed to the promotion of a government that is broad-based representative and multi-ethnic.

He said Pakistan and no separate agenda on Afghanistan and was only concerned over the instability in that country which was affecting both Iran and Pakistan. "I hope if the two countries can combine their efforts they can achieve the objective of a broad-based and multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan", he explained.

NATION 08 DEC 1999

Pakistan freezes Taliban bank accounts

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DAWN 08 DEC 1999

Musharraf, Khatami end talks

Pakistan, Iran agree on Afghan peace plan

TEHRAN, Dec 9: General Pervez Musharraf left Tehran on Thursday at the end of a two-day visit during which the crisis in Afghanistan and killing of Iranian nationals in Pakistan were at the top of the agenda.

"We have agreed that the crisis in Afghanistan can only be settled through establishment of a ceasefire, negotiations between the warring sides and formation of a broad-based government consisting of all Afghan factions," Musharraf told reporters before leaving Tehran.

In a statement faxed to AFP bureau in Tehran, Musharraf said Pakistan and Iran would "coordinate" their policies on Afghanistan to establish peace in their joint neighbour.

He said: "On Afghanistan, we agreed to coordinate the policies of our two countries for encouraging the peace process through reconciliation and dialogue among the Afghan parties."

"We reaffirmed our support for the establishment of a broad-based, representative, and multi-ethnic government in accordance with the wishes of the Afghan people," he said.

"I have no doubt that the traditional friendship between our two countries will continue to promote deeper and broader cooperation in all spheres. Pakistan-Iran collaboration is fundamental to regional peace and stability," Musharraf stressed.

Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi told state-run television Iran hoped that "the hindrances between the two states would be removed".

Musharraf had also promised Iranian leaders that those responsible for the killing of Iranian nationals in Pakistan would be punished according to law.

Musharraf met on Thursday with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A second meeting with President Mohammad Khatami was cancelled as Khatami was sick with a flu, sources said.

Musharraf met Khatami on Wednesday night, when Khatami told the visitor: "Relations between the two states are deeply rooted and unbreakable," adding: "Both sides ought to defend this relationship."

The Iranian president termed the killing of Iranian nationals by terrorists in Pakistan "narrow-mindedness and discriminatory factionalism".

Musharraf said he deeply regretted the killing of the Iranians.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Tehran said on Tuesday that Musharraf would try to bring Iran closer to the Taliban in order to enable formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.-dpa/AFP

DAWN
10 DEC 1999

DAWN
12 DEC 1999

Accord with Kabul on wheat supply likely: FO

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, Dec 11 : A Foreign Office spokesman said here on Saturday that Pakistan shared the concern expressed by the World Food Programme regarding severe food shortages in Afghanistan.

In a statement, the spokesman said that, according to the latest estimates, cereal deficit in Afghanistan in 1999-2000 was estimated at about 1.1 million tons. He said that only a part of the deficit — 100,000 tons of wheat and other commodities— would be supplied by the WFP this year.

The spokesman said that despite its own dependence on food import, Pakistan would try to help Afghanistan as much as possible to overcome this crisis.

It was imperative that the international community took notice of this grave situation which had been exacerbated by the recent UN sanctions, and rush emergency food aid to Afghanistan on humanitarian considerations.

Pakistan seeks world neutrality on Afghan issue

DAWN
12 DEC 1999

By Masood Haider

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 11: Pakistan called upon the international community to renew its efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan, saying that the beginning of winter and cessation of hostilities have presented a "window of opportunity".

It underscored "that only an intra-Afghan consensus can ensure durable peace. There can be no solution from outside Afghanistan. That is an immutable lesson of Afghan history".

Speaking at a debate on the Afghan situation in the General Assembly on Friday, Pakistan ambassador to UN Inamul Haque said the international community must remain neutral between the parties, for it had to remain a credible interlocutor.

"To demonize one side would be counter-productive. It is through impartiality that the international community can hope to bring durable peace to Afghanistan," he added

The GA was debating the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Haque said it was not possible nor would it be fair to single out any Afghan party and hold it responsible for the cumulative ills of the last 20 years. It must not be forgotten that in the intervening period — that is, between the end of foreign occupation of Afghanistan and the advent of the Taliban movement — the very factions that now formed the United Front were at war among themselves as well as against other Afghan groups.

The Taliban emerged only a few years back, as a reaction to the excesses of the Afghan warlords. As such, the blame for the disaster in Afghanistan cannot be placed on the Taliban alone, Haque said.

He said: "Pakistan believes that the Six plus Two group can and must play its role in finding a durable solution to the conflict. We do not share the doubts expressed by some about the effectiveness of the Group. The Tashkent Declaration was a clear manifestation of the agreement of the Group on the steps to be taken for the return of peace to Afghanistan".

Appreciating the decision of the secretary-general to strengthen and upgrade the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan, Pakistan's chief delegate, however, said: "We regret that the work of the special envoy of the secretary-general has been frozen at his own request.

"We believe that the United Nations, the secretary-general and his special envoy must continue their efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan. The international community must remain engaged and utilize to the maximum the window of opportunity presented by the onset of winter for the promotion of negotiations between the warring parties," he said.

Haque renewed the call for the imposition of an arms embargo applicable to the whole of Afghanistan. An embargo on military supplies would greatly reduce the ability of the Afghan factions to continue the fighting. We will continue to work for this objective.

He stressed that the arms embargo must be accompanied by a comprehensive programme for the reconstruction of the country and the rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees.

The economic reconstruction of Afghanistan would strengthen and reinforce the impulses for peace and stability in the country.

"Pakistan cannot isolate itself from the fallout of the conflict. The influx of millions of Afghan refugees impose heavy social and economic costs on Pakistan. While the overall size of Afghan refugee population in Pakistan has ebbed, approx 1.8 million refugees remain in Pakistan even today. They represent the largest concentration of refugees in any part of the world."

Monitoring of Afghan border heightened

ISLAMABAD (PPI) – In order to check smuggling of wheat from Pakistan to Afghanistan, the authorities have heightened monitoring of its borders with the war-ravaged country.

Sources told the agency that additional troops of Pakistan Rangers and Frontier Constabulary have been deployed and pickets established on all the routes leading to the border. Besides, strict check was being kept on movements in areas close to the border.

The development follows foiling of an attempt of wheat smuggling from Peshawar on Friday last.

Meanwhile, in view of acute shortage of wheat in the Frontier province, the administration has decided to provide flour to the Pakistan nationals on production of national identity cards. However, arrangements were being made to provide flour to the Afghan refugees in their camps.

NATION
20 DEC 1999

Implications of partial trade ban on Afghanistan discussed

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD – Pakistani officials on Monday discussed the political and economic implications of partial trade ban on Afghanistan on the bilateral relations between the two countries.

A strong view exist in the official circles that instead of imposing partial trade ban on Afghanistan a concerted effort should be made to check the menace of smuggling which is still going on despite the ban on 17 items initially included in the Afghan Transit Trade list.

A high Level meeting presided over by Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar reviewed the whole range of issues related to the Afghan Transit Trade and partial trade ban. The meeting also examined the demand for lifting ban on 17 item on the Afghan Transit Trade list.

The Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider, Commerce Minister Razzaq Daud and Minister for Food and Agriculture Shafqat Jamoot participated in the meeting and presented the viewpoints of their respective ministries on the issues related to Afghan Transit Trade.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan Aziz Khan briefed the meeting about the implications of the issue of Afghan Transit Trade on the bilateral relations between the two countries. The wheat crisis in Afghanistan was also discussed at length in the meeting.

Recently Iran has opened its border with Afghanistan for trade and according to reports the wheat price fell down marginally in Afghan market after the flow of wheat from started there.

Sources said that the government is considering to delete about 44 items from the list of Afghan Transit Trade. However the Taliban Administration has conveyed to the Pakistani authorities that Afghan Transit Trade Agreement is a bilateral agreement and it cannot be amended unilaterally. There is a strong opinion in Pakistani official circles that partial trade ban on Afghanistan would adversely affect the relations between the two countries, when the Afghan people are already facing hardships because of UN sanctions.

NATION

04 DEC 1999

Pakistan to supply 10,000 mt wheat to Afghanistan

By Our Staff Corespondent

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan will provide 10,000 metric tons to war-torn Afghanistan and a bilateral agreement between two countries is in the process for regular wheat supply to that country, said Rashid Mahmood Insari, joint Secretary Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Livestock on Monday.

Rashid said Pakistan will deliver 10,000 metric tons as it has been immediately demanded by Taliban government. Rashid denied media reports that wheat is being smuggled to NWFP from Iran via informal routes of Afghanistan's porous border.

World Food Programme has expressed concern over food crises in Afghanistan.

Possible pact between Taliban and Pakistan is being seen as a big policy measure to contain growing smuggling of food items to Afghanistan particularly after United Nation's economic sanctions. However, this is not yet clear whether Pakistan would place this possible agreement under Afghan Transit Trade or what other mechanism would be adopted to export wheat to Afghanistan as Pakistan is already importing substantial quantity of wheat. The pact between the two countries is being seen to be aiming to discourage wheat smuggling that caused flour crises in the country in April 1997.

NATION

14 DEC 1999

UN, US urged to halt arms supply to Afghan factions

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Haji Mohammad Adeel, ANP Central Information Secretary and Deputy Speaker of the suspended NWFP Assembly has said that instead of imposing economic sanctions against Afghanistan. The UN and USA should halt supply of arms and ammunition to the warring factions.

Talking to a group of journalists here on Tuesday, Haji Mohammad Adeel showed resentment over imposition of economic sanctions against Afghanistan and said that it could further enhance miseries of the war-affected Afghans. Elaborating his point of view, the ANP leader reminded that it is crystal clear that majority of the Afghans are neither involved in in-fighting which is in progress since withdrawal of the former Soviet troops from Afghanistan nor they are favouring terrorism and drug-trafficking. He added that almost all of them are desirous for restoration of peace and tranquility in their motherland.

The Deputy Speaker of the suspended NWFP Assembly has further said that warring factions involved in tug of war for power and resources are being patronised by their foreign masters. Whatever may be the stand of UNO and USA on such sanctions, but it is clear that those foreign, neighbouring and regional countries involved in a proxy war in Afghanistan didn't bother. He was of the view that if UN and USA want resolution of the matter.

Advocating in favour of his point of view, Haji Mohammad Adeel said that unless establishment of a centralised and representative government, Afghan soil could be safe haven for terrorists. In this connection, he said that UN, USA and other countries need to take practical steps for finding out a durable solution to the issue. He was of the firm belief that through such steps, the USA and UN could get their objectives, therefore, they need to extend support to the peace-loving Afghans.

In response to a question, Haji Mohammad Adeel said that 20-year long fighting in Afghanistan has proved that no one could impose puppets on Afghans. And they believe that only Afghans have the right to decide about their future and governments. In this connection, he said that majority of the Afghans are supporting the demand for convening a meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga. He added that now it is the high time for the UN and USA to back such a proposal.

Answering another question, Haji Mohammad Adeel said that sanctions against Afghanistan could enhance problems for people of NWFP in particular and rest of the country in general. He added that majority of the Afghan refugees are not only settled in NWFP but even almost all Afghans are dependent on limited resources of this province.

As a result of sanctions, when Afghans would face shortage of wheat flour, they would automatically approach the NWFP. He urged the rulers to handle the matter with the UN and USA.

NATION 15 DEC 1999

Afghans worst hit by price-hike

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Prof. Qazi Gul Rehman, an Afghan educationist has diverted attention of the global community towards [illegible] of price hike and shortage of edible items in various parts of Afghanistan which had made further miserable lives of the innocent people.

Talking to *The Nation* on telephone, Prof. Qazi Gul Rehman who arrived back after [illegible] Afghanistan said [illegible] of the Afghans were further increased in the last seven years when the ill-minded factions and groups entered into fighting, he remarked. While the recent sanctions and economic embargo had multiplied grievances of the common Afghans. The Afghan educationist further said that majority of Afghans is being confined to homes during winter when whole of Afghanistan faces snowfall. During such a period it is impossible for the Afghans to continue work.

Police continue raids on Afghans' residences

ISLAMABAD (NNI) – The Capital police on Sunday continued raids on Afghan residents' fats in different areas in Islamabad and arrested more Afghan refugees, Afghan refugees said.

Refugees told this agency that during the operation, where no policewomen were present, searched the houses very rudely the closets and cabinets of the flats where women and children.

"It was almost 2.00 o clock at night that sounds of horrible knocking woke us up, and we thought may be there is rocket attacks on us or any earthquake," said one resident said whose brother was taken to police lockup without giving any reason.

A housewife whose husband was taken away said, the police entered her house with dirty shoes and started searching the closets and cupboards and scattered every thing in the room, my children were all afraid and were clinging around my legs, she said.

With tearful eyes she said, "where we should go now. Is this shelter they have given to us. We have the honor or dignity but stranger male officials without any reason or official permission entered a house at that time of night where school-going children are sleeping and start searching for weapon".

The Afghan residents said that if Pakistan government wants them to leave the city then it should officially issue an order and give them an ultimatum to leave, but it should not harass them.

The reason for rounding up the Afghans was not clear. Local residents said that two residents were shot in Islamabad G-7/2 sector Friday night when they were coming from a mosque.

NATION

20 DEC 1999

Wheat import

Pakistan asks Afghanistan to sign new pact

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: Pakistan has offered Taliban authorities to import wheat from Pakistan by reviving the 1997 accord or sign a new agreement to this effect.

Sources in the finance ministry told *Dawn* that Pakistan also planned to import 0.3 million tons of wheat to be supplied to Afghanistan under the new arrangement which was being finalized by officials of the two countries.

They said the decision to this effect had been taken at a very high level meeting after serious flour crisis in Afghanistan in the wake of the recently imposed UN sanctions.

They said the GoP had made it clear to the Afghan government that it would supply the commodity only when it (Afghanistan) agrees to revive the 1997 accord under which Pakistan would continue to import wheat on behalf of Afghanistan or sign a new pact to this effect.

Under the new arrangement, they added, Taliban government would pay the whole amount of imported commodity in Pakistani currency.

Sources in the chief executive secretariat also confirmed to *Dawn* that a summary had already been received from agriculture ministry seeking approval of the competent authority for the import of 0.3 million tons of wheat.

Sources said apart from this, Pakistan had already made a commitment to provide 25,000 tons of wheat to Afghanistan immediately

Giving reasons for Pakistan's repeated insistence on signing a new accord regarding wheat import, sources said on October 30, 1997, Afghan government had signed an accord with the GoP for supply of wheat. Subsequently, Pakistan imported 600,000 tons of wheat for Afghanistan.

But, they said, Afghan authorities lifted only 20,000 tons of wheat from Balochistan and NWFP flour mills. The remaining stock was lying in the godowns and Pakistan had to suffer heavy losses on this account.

Since then, they said Taliban authorities did not contact Pakistan. In the meantime, they added the food ministry contacted Pakistan foreign office and suggested that Taliban government may be convinced to import wheat on government to government basis.

However, they added on Sept 23, 1999 the foreign office told the food ministry that Taliban government had expressed its serious reservations over this proposal saying "wheat received from Pakistan remains in the central silo. That is why, the commerce ministry does not consider to continue the contract forthwith".

In the meantime, they said, after the imposition of UN sanctions, on Sept 30, 1999 a Taliban team had visited Pakistan and requested for supply of flour from Balochistan and NWFP.

Upon this, they were offered to buy wheat at Rs9.76 a kg without bag and Rs10.27 a kg with bag. They were also told that in addition Rs1.10 a kg would be charged for wheat grinding.

But, sources said, they agreed to buy wheat at Rs9.49 per kg without bag and Rs10 with bag.

DAWN 22 DEC 1999

Paris moot condemns Pakistan for interfering in Afghanistan

NATION '20 DEC 1999

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Paris conference on "Terrorism in Afghanistan" has strongly condemned Pakistan for interfering in the war-ravaged Afghanistan.

"The conference discussed drugs smuggling and spread of terrorism from Afghanistan but the stress was laid on the interference in that country" Peter Thompson a former US special envoy for the Afghanistan Resistance Forces told the VOA in an interview.

He said that the conference strongly criticized Pakistan particularly Pakistan Intelligence agency, ISI and Taliban. He said that the conference was to discuss terrorism in Afghanistan but it covered all the issues including foreign interference in Afghanistan. He said that Islamabad was condemned for interfering in Afghanistan.

Thompson said that the conference was attended by member of the French Senate and parliament, Ambassadors of Russia, Pakistan and US and Foreign Secretary of Rabbani regime.

A number of experts of the Afghan affairs from different countries including Iran also took part in it. The conference had been organized jointly by the French Senators and Afghan Embassy in Paris because it was held in the building of the French Senators and was also attended by the former French Minister, Bros. Lalondi, he said. Lalondi at the head of a delegation had recently visited Panjsher.

He said that an Iranian expert of the Afghanistan affairs, Changez Pehlawan also participated in the conference and delivered a lengthy speech at the conference. Besides, a member of Benazir Bhutto's cabinet also addressed the conference and denounced ISI for interfering in Afghanistan to bring to power a regime of its choice.

He said that he is also closely watching situation in Afghanistan and has worked for years there. He was of the view that the Taliban regime cannot last in Afghanistan and arrangements for the future should be made just now. He said that in his address, he referred to three points that although a comprehensive solution could not be found to the Afghan conflict yet he can extend help in exploring solution to the issue.

He added that peace couldn't return to Afghanistan unless foreign forces like Pakistan, Russia, Iran and others stop meddling in Afghanistan. The restoration of peace in Afghanistan would be difficult as long as these countries continue to strengthen their favourites there. That is why, foreign interference must be halted and an agreement like Austrian peace accord be effected. Although the situation and condition in Afghanistan and Austria vary and all the neighbours do not accept impartiality and nonaligned status of Afghanistan but they should do so and avoid interfering in that country.

Taliban would not remain in power for long and should be replaced. Peter Thompson said that the regime that replaces the Taliban should not be like the Taliban or Rabbani regime. Rabbani was just sticking to powers and did not care for the country. Therefore the international community should try for the formation of a regime accommodating all ethnic groups.

This regime should later pave the way for the Afghans to elect their leaders and decide their fate by themselves. He said that this might by done through Loya Jirga. He said that six plus two group is almost non-existent and should be totally dissolved and replaced by another group in the name of "Friends of Afghanistan".

He said that all those countries which wholeheartedly want restoration of peace in Afghanistan should joint it. He added that the United Nations should decide as to which country has the right to be included in the group. He said that besides extending help in political settlement of the conflict, these countries should make great efforts for reconstruction of Afghanistan and revival of the Afghan economy.

Thomson was of the view that these points would help resolve the Afghan conflict. Thomson said that he does understand and realize that resolution of the Afghan conflict is not very easy but said he has firm belief in the people of Afghanistan who themselves would eventually explore a solution to the problem.

'Canadian aid to Afghanistan to continue'

NATION 20 DEC 1999

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - The Secretary General Human Rights Wing of International Development Department of Canada, Hunter McGill has said that besides mines-sweeping programmes, Ottawa would continue humanitarian aid to Afghanistan in education and health sectors.

In an interview with the VOA, McGill said that the government of Canada places a huge emphasis on land mines action both in mines-sweeping and assistance to the maimed people and keeping them aware of the threat of the mines. He said that they also help mine detecting projects. He added that such assistance is being given to the United Nations and other organizations working for mines clearing in Afghanistan. He went on to say that they have expanded the scope of humanitarian aid programme in recognition of the difficult circumstances in Afghanistan so that activities that do not fall within the humanitarian programme like education and health and civic affairs are included in it. The reason is that Canada cannot resume its previous development programmes due to fighting in Afghanistan.

McGill, who also attended last week meeting of the donor countries in Canada said that the meeting noted that in some cases, there had been progress on important issues relating to human rights and gender in Afghanistan. The meeting, he said, expressed pleasure over it but also said that there are still some major human rights issues in Afghanistan particularly the continuation of war is the matter of great concern because common people fall prey to the attacks, which is violation of international human rights. He said that the meeting decided to discuss these issues with both the warring factions.

McGill said that the participants of the meeting were unanimous to continue humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. He hoped that they would further expand their programmes in the areas where peace prevails. The humanitarian aid would be supplied to those as well who remained deprived of it like Panjsher, he said.

DAWN 11 DEC 1999



ISLAMABAD: Women and children protest on the Human Rights Day in front of the UN office here on Friday—Dawn



Afghanistan ambassder Sayed Muhmmad Haqqani addressing a Press conference in Islamabad on Tuesday.–Staff photo

NATION 22 DEC 1999

DAWN 22 DEC 1999



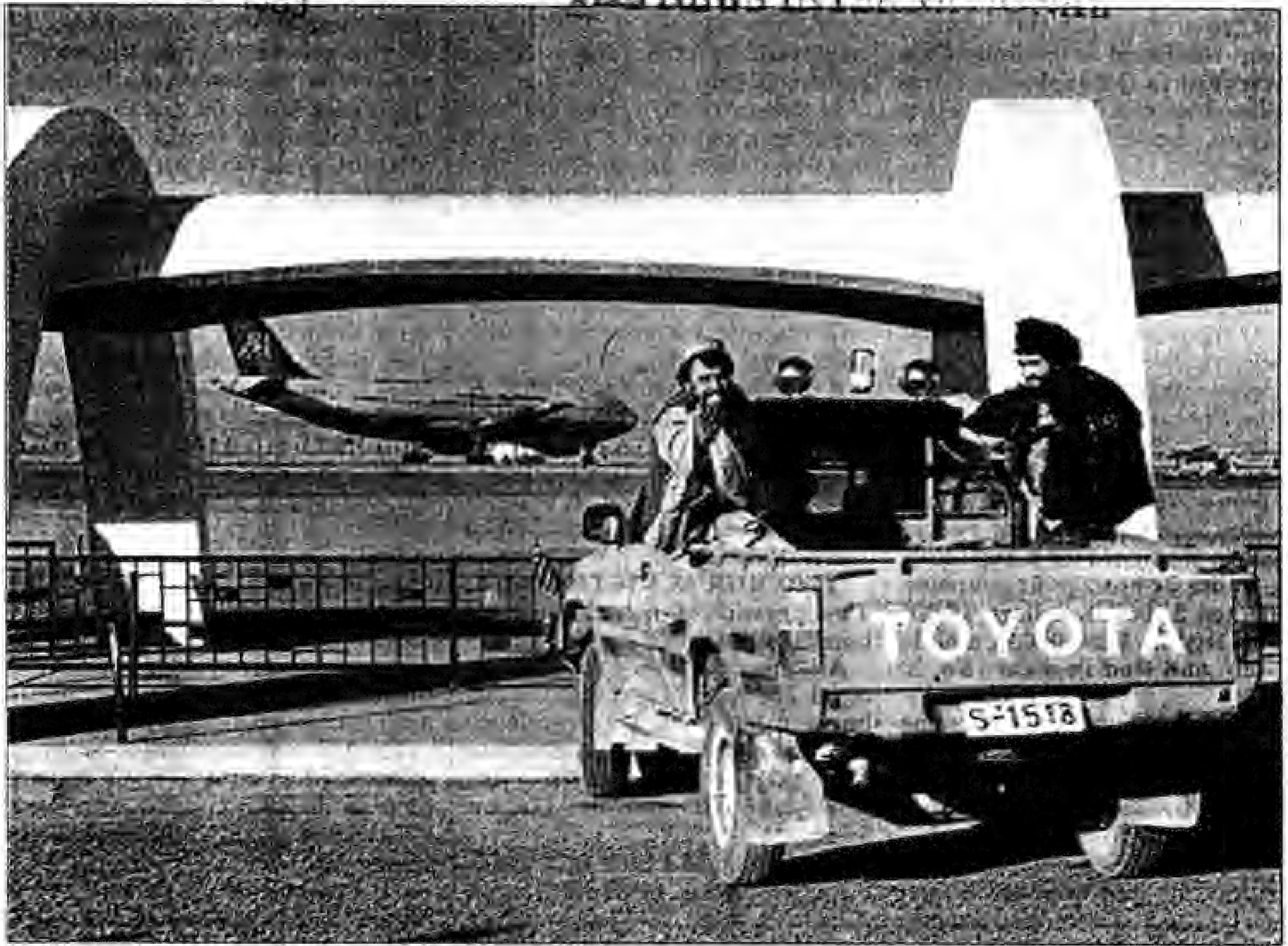
TEHRAN: Iranian President Mohammad Khatami meets ousted Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani here on Tuesday.—AFP



An Afghan going back home for *Iftar*, after the day long labour in Islamabad, on Thursday.–Photo by Mian Khurshid

NATION 24 DEC 1999

27 DEC 1999 DAWN THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL



KANDAHAR: Taliban militia stand alert at the Kandahar airport where the hijacked Indian Airlines Airbus A-300 (background) sits on the tarmac here on Sunday.—AFP



KANDAHAR: An Indian official (L) speaks on a satellite phone with his superiors in New Delhi about the latest developments in negotiations with the hijackers.–AFP

NATION 29 DEC 1999

Taliban govt urged to recognise women's rights

NATION 18 DEC 1999

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Fatana Ishaq Gillani, chief of the Afghan Women Council has expressed surprise over Taliban's invitation to American first lady Hillary Clinton and said that how she could learn about plight of the women when no one is allowed to came out of homes and speak against restrictions imposed by the rulers in all over Afghanistan.

"Taliban policies towards women in Afghanistan are not only unclear but doubtful," she remarked here on Friday. She said that instead of mustering sympathies on the name of women, Taliban leaders need to first revise their own policies and later pin-point the economic compulsions of each and every one. She added that it is crystal clear that as a result of 20-year long fighting whole of Afghanistan was badly affected and majority of the Afghans are unable to get two time meal.

Referring to Taliban leader's invitation to American first lady for visiting Afghanistan Fatana Ishaq Gillani stated it surprising more on the part of Taliban. She reminded that some three years back, Taliban had captured Kabul but they are yet to announce refunctioning of the women educational institutions as well as allowing the women doctors, nurses and employees of other functionaries to continue jobs for earning livelihood sources for them. "The women of Afghanistan, have the right to get education and health facilities," she remarked.

Elaborating further her point of view, Fatana Ishaq Gillani said that on one hand lakhs of Afghan women had lost their bread earners in the fighting and on the other thousands of women lost their jobs due to restrictions of Taliban leaders.

She was of the view that for their survival, such helpless and innocent but even educated and civilised women are compelled to beg in bazaars of Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. She said that instead of inviting the American first lady Taliban leaders need to revise their policies and provide rights and privileges to the Afghan women.

Fatana Ishaq Gillani further said that there is no justification for Taliban leaders to compare the Afghanistan situation with the previous regime of Rabbani. They need to point out before the world their contribution to the women regarding health, education, employment, welfare, rehabilitation and others. She recalled that in the last three years Taliban leaders had failed to take any step for the betterment of women.

The Afghan Women Council leader said that Islam is a comprehensive religion and it provides more rights to the women. Unfortunately some of the self-interested elements have always deceived the Afghans with misinterpretation of the religion. She urged Taliban to ensure maximum rights to the Afghan women as prescribed by Islam instead of inviting the American lady.

Afghan women hold demonstration for rights

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, Dec 10: A group of Afghan women led by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) organised a demonstration outside the offices of the United Nations here in connection with the observance of the Human Rights Day on Friday morning.

The group comprised young Afghani women from Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The leaders of the group presented to the director of operations UNDP Mr Richard Dictus a memorandum containing their RAWA point of view on Afghan women.

According to the two-page document, the RAWA reiterated its stand on the women's situation. It called upon all pro-democracy organisations not to be mere spectators to the savage violation of human rights and great tragedy in Afghanistan but raise voice against the fundamentalists and prove their sincerity to "our people and particularly women in practice."

The 11-point document said that for the formation of a free, independent and democratic Afghanistan, the joint striving and struggle of pro-liberty and democratic forces is indispensable. It said that this objective can only be achieved through compromise and capitulation.

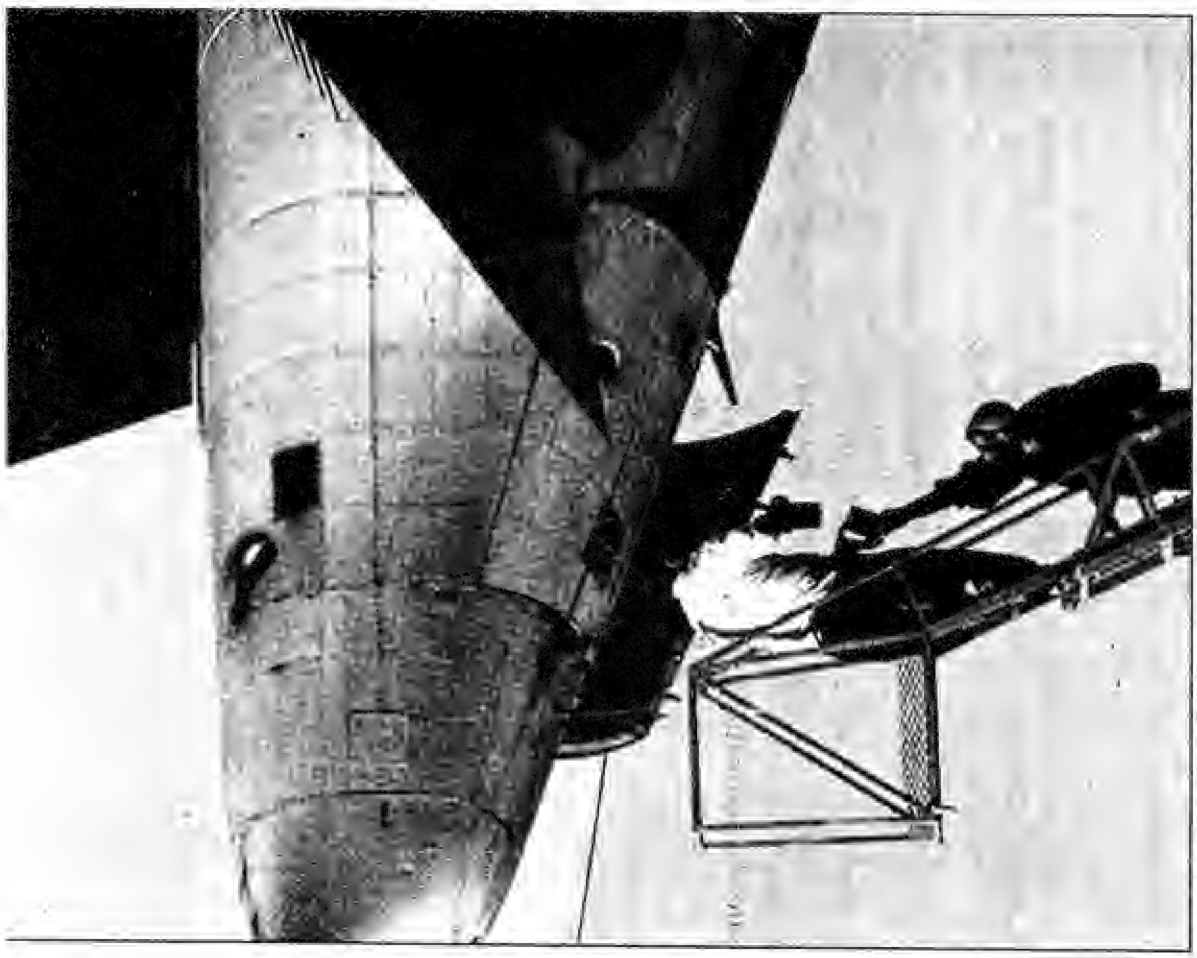
The RAWA said that the women's rights are human rights. In its document, the RAWA said that if the US and other countries really want to help the people of Afghanistan, they must first and foremost impose strict curbs on those countries which continue to nurture Taliban and their Jihadi rivals with arms and money.

The RAWA severely criticised the Afghan government for human rights and women rights violations. Later the demonstrators dispersed.

DAWN 11 DEC 1999



KANDAHAR: The Taliban officials stand near a hijacker (masked and in red shirt) while the hijacked Indian Airways plane is repaired by Indian engineers at the airport runway here on Tuesday.—AFP



KANDAHAR: An Indian engineer (top) is helped by an Afghan as they repair the tail-end of the hijacked plane at Kandahar airport on Tuesday. One of the hijackers came out of the Indian Airlines plane as a guarantee to Indian engineers who went inside the plane to repair an engine which failed earlier in the day.—Reuters

NATION 30 DEC 1999



KANDAHAR: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia soldiers beside an Indian hijacked plane reading newspaper at the airport.–AFP



Afghan boys at Kandahar airport fill empty mineral water bottles from a tap for hijackers and hostages of Indian Airlines plane in Kandahar on Wednesday.–AFP

NATION 30 DEC 1999

NATION 30 DEC 1999



Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad addressing a Press conference at the runway where the hijacked Indian plane is parked in Kandahar on Wednesday.–AFP



KANDAHAR: A Taliban guard, carrying rocket-propelled grenades, on Wednesday cycles down the runway at the airport here where a hijacked Indian Airlines jet is parked.—AFP

NATION

30 DEC 1999

NATION 31 DEC 1999



Taliban Islamic militia commandos head towards the hijacked Indian plane at Kandahar airport on Thursday.–AFP



KANDAHAR: A hijacker holding a pistol climbs down a ladder from beneath the aircraft cockpit and looks around at the airport.–AFP

NATION

31 DEC 1999

Release of Maulana Azhar, other Kashmiri leaders demanded: Ailing passenger freed

Hijackers-UN talks fail

Talks failure due to Delhi 'callousness': Taliban refuel plane, criticise India: Plane may leave Kandahar

From Shahzada Zulfiqar

KANDAHAR–The negotiations between a three-member United Nations delegation and the hijackers of the Indian Air Bus 300 Sunday remained fruitless mainly because of the non-participation of any Indian government representative. The hijackers, however, remained stuck to their demands for the release of some Kashmiri leaders.

"After failing on Indian side to send the delegation, now the Taliban authorities are compelled to refuel the plane and let it go wherever they want to go," Maulvi Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor, the Chief of Civil Aviation of Afghanistan, while talking to a group of journalists in his office at the Kandahar Airport.

Briefing about the progress regarding the plane hijack, Maulvi Mansoor said that the three-member delegation of the United Nations reached here Sunday morning to talk the hijackers. He said that during the negotiations on wireless through Air Control Tower, which lasted for one hour, the hijackers remained steadfast to their demands.

"The progress in this regard on Indian side is very slow as they promised us to send a delegation for the talks with the hijackers till midday, but till evening there is no news about them. So Tali-

See page 15



Taliban Militia stand alert at airport where the hijacked Airbus (background) sits on the tarmac.–AFP

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NATION 27 DEC 1999

Hijackers-UN officials talks fail

From page 1

ban, who already are cautious regarding their position, have no option to allow the hijacked aircraft to leave for another country," said Maulvi Mansoor.

About the demands of the hijackers, CAA chief said that they were insisting for the release of the Kashmiri leaders including Maulvi Masood Azhar jailed in India and stressed for involving the Indians in the process of negotiations. He said that the UN people also requested for the release of some passengers as a goodwill gesture to restore the confidence and in view of the seriousness towards the issue. He said that on the request, the hijackers released an ailing passenger Anil Khurna who seemed to be in his forties.

He said that the released passenger refused to go as he said that his brother was among the 160 members on board the plane. He said that Anil Khurna was angry with the Indian government for failing to tackle the issue urgently and, of course, for the disregard about the very serious situation.

"Had the son of an Indian Minister been there among the hostages, the matter would have been resolved within hours," Maulvi Mansoor said while quoting the Indian passenger.

The CAA chief, who was present there with the Afghan Foreign Minister Maulvi Wakeel Ahmad Motawakil in the negotiations, categorically said that Taliban authorities did not allow the India hijacked plane to land on the Afghan soil for any political reasons, rather on humanitarian grounds. He said that if the plane had not been allowed to land, there might have been damages to the plane carrying some 160 people.

Maulvi Mansoor said that the Indian government had requested them (Taliban) for allowing their two planes to land at the Kandahar Airport, but they (Taliban) had permitted only one aircraft. He said when asked the Indian government explained that one would carry the people for negotiations while the other one was for the pilots as they wanted "to replace the pilots who might have tired now."

He said that now two days had passed and Taliban were asked to allow the aircraft for two days, but they were very slow.

He said that United Nations could play a very positive role in the process.

To a question that Taliban would allow the commando action, if the Indian government requested for that, Maulvi Masoom replied: "We do not want to turn the Afghan soil a "battlefield".

Meanwhile, knowledgeable sources here told *The Nation that among the three UN people one was Indian national who also talked to hijackers, but his identity was not disclosed.*

During the negotiations when the UN people asked for the release of some people as a goodwill gesture, the hijackers replied: "Indian should make goodwill gesture by releasing thousands of Kashmiri people first, instead of asking for 160 people".

No extra security arrangements were made on the airport by the Taliban as no member of the security agency was witnessed near the Indian plane. Two Russian-made trucks were parked on the runway, some 100 yards from the plane. The Ariana Airlines plane kept flying as routine and a UN aircraft was also seem, which landed carrying the UN officials.

The sources further said when UN officials asked about the health of passengers, the hijackers said: "They are very happy as you have already talked to pilots and they may celebrate new millennium with us on aircraft."

Later, this correspondent tried to talk to Anil Khurna, the released passenger but he refused, saying "when I was not being taken to a doctor, why should I talk to journalist."

AFP adds: Taliban aviation minister Mulah Abdul Mansoor said the aircraft, seized on Christmas Eve, would be allowed to leave the country and criticised New Delhi for not resolving the crisis.

'The Indians are being slow in settling the problem,' he told AFP in Kandahar.

Food, water provided

Troops from the Islamic regime surrounded the aircraft, provided food and water, a Taliban spokesman said.

But they resisted Indian demands for a rescue and refused to let the hijackers leave the plane.

A Taliban Kandahar airport official said the hijackers have thrown a letter out of the plane asking for water, food and fuel.

'We have given them water and food. Maybe fuel has also been given,' he said by satellite phone.

But he dismissed reports that the hijackers had demanded to stay in Afghanistan.

NATION 27 DEC 1999

Plane hijacking

Afghans condemn Indian propaganda

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – A number of Afghan elders have expressed resentment over Indian media propaganda against Afghan peopleregarding hijacking of a plane and urged the Indian leaders not to blame whole nation just to hide its own inefficiencies.

Through separate Press statements issued here on Sunday, the Afghan elites have claimed that they are much democrat and peace-loving but due to interferences of a number of foreign countries, now facing bad days of their national history. Former Deputy foreign minister and chief of Popalzai tribe Hamid Karzai while expressing concern over the Indian media propaganda against the Pukhtoons, has recalled that Pukhtoons have not only ruled over Indian sub continent for hundreds of years but it were only the Pukhtoons who had blocked advancement of the former colonial rulers.

Hamid Karzai further said that Pukhtoons from all over the world are considered among the civilised nations and they never indulge in brutalities.

Former Afghan Consul General at Quetta and leader of the Afghan National Liberation Front Humayoon Shinwari has said that there was no justification for the Indians to blame the Pukhtoon nation for the misdeed of a few hardliners. He said that Pukhtoon heroe are much respectable in all over India for their patience and human sympathies.

Similar were the views of a leading tribal elder from Zadran tribe Haji Badshah Khan Zadran from Paktya province and Shehzada Mehsud from Logar province. Both of them said that they are concerned over hijacking of the Indian plane.

NATION

27 DEC 1999

Afghanistan doesn't want 'innocent' blood on its soil

KANDAHAR (AFP) - Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said Tuesday the ruling Taliban militia did not want any innocent blood on its soil, as negotiations to end the hijack crisis continued.

'Our Amir (ruler) does not want blood of innocent people to fall on the soil of Afghanistan,' Mutawakel said, referring to Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Mutawakel told reporters talks between the Indian negotiators and the hijackers of the Airbus A300 were in progress, but he avoided anticipating an outcome.

'We see it like this: The Indians have one key and the hijackers have one, while the Taliban are holding the lock firmly and urging them to open it. We wish and are eager to see the lock opened,' he said.

UN says now taking a back seat in Indian hijack negotiations

United Nations officials have taken a back seat in negotiations with hijackers holding 160 people hostage on board an Indian Airlines jet in Afghanistan, a UN official told AFP.

UN coordinator for Afghanistan Erick de Mul, who arrived here Sunday, flew back to Islamabad on Tuesday.

The UN field security officer for Afghanistan, Alan Primelow, was still liaising at Kandahar, where the Airbus A300 jet has been parked on the runway since Saturday.

Indian diplomats were negotiating with the hijackers.

'The UN has withdrawn from the process,' Primelow said. 'There is no need for the UN to negotiate, however we are to some extent still coordinating.'

'The United Nations negotiators involved themselves at the request of the Afghan Taliban. When we saw that the other party (India) arrived we withdrew.'

Hijackers refuse to accept food for hostages

KANDAHAR (AFP) - Hijackers holding 160 hostages aboard an Indian Airlines jet in Afghanistan twice refused to accept food for the passengers, a Taliban official told AFP Tuesday.

The hijackers refused to accept lunch and dinner for their hostages on Monday because they were angry that guards from Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia surrounded the plane, said Kandahar's airport manager Haji Rahmat Ullah.

But the hijackers did accept a breakfast of eggs, bread and mineral water on Tuesday, he said.

'The surrounding of the plane by the commandos made them angry and so they refused both lunch and dinner,' Ullah said.

Taliban guards surrounded the aircraft on Monday after the hijackers warned they would start killing passengers if their demands were not met within a deadline.

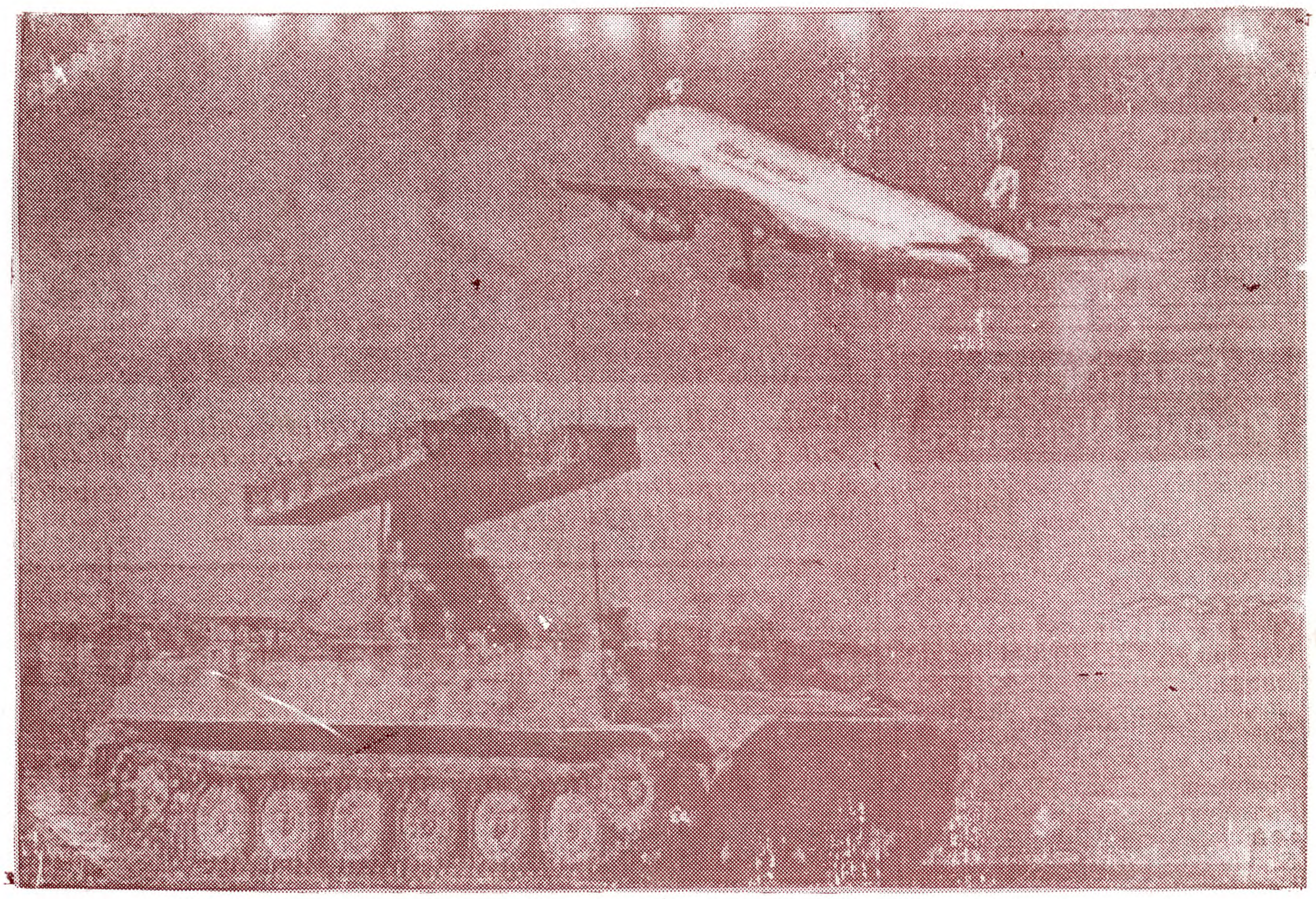
The deadline passed with no apparent violence after the Taliban threatened to storm the plane and New Delhi said they would send negotiators. Negotiations were still underway Tuesday.

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29 DEC 1999

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